Without Compromise

Dr. Bennet Thompson

George Hubbard

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/withoutcompromis00thomiala

WITHOUT COMPROMISE

WITHOUT COMPROMISE

BY
LILIAN BENNET-THOMPSON
AND
GEORGE HUBBARD

NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.
1922

Copyright, 1922, by
THE CENTURY CO.

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

TO

HENRY GALLUP PAINE

WITH AFFECTIONATE REGARD

2135700

WITHOUT COMPROMISE

Without Compromise

I

FROM the narrow, scarred doorway of the express office, a fat youth emerged; he cast a languid glance up and down the street, yawned, cupped his hands about his mouth, and vociferated shrilly:

"Dick! Dick Leighton!"

"Ike Milliken's calling you, Dick," the pretty young woman at the stamp window remarked; and Leighton nodded.

"Thanks. I heard him, Norah. I 'll see what he wants, in a minute."

"How 's the Judge to-day?"

"About the same. A little weaker, if anything, the nurse told me over the telephone. I 'm on my way up to the house now." Leighton glanced into one of the numbered boxes, found it empty, and went out of the post-office. "What do you want, Ike?" he asked, when he was half-way across the street.

Milliken yawned again, prodigiously, closing his

eyes and opening his mouth until it rounded out into an enormous O.

"Pa'ka f'r Jugruch," he announced.

"What?"

"Package for Judge Randolph," Milliken repeated, somewhat more lucidly. "It come this morning, and it 's marked 'Perishable,' so I thought I 'd better tell you."

"But why the extraordinary haste?" Dick inquired pleasantly. "Surely it ought to take more than six hours to send anything three whole blocks!"

"Well, I did n't have nobody to send," protested Milliken, in an aggrieved tone, "and of course I could n't leave the office. I figured I 'd see you go by. And, anyways," he wound up, "I guess it ain't hurt none. Do you want to take it now, or shall I wait and—"

"Get it!" Dick interrupted. "I 'll take it with me. Perishable stuff!—and lying around in that cubby-hole since the nine train this morning!"

"Well, I did n't have nobody to send, I tell you!" Milliken turned back into the small, dark room that served as express and telegraph office, and brought out an oblong box, the cover of which bore the imprint of a Pennsylvania nursery. "How was I to get it over, I 'd like to know? S'pose I 'd left the office and somebody 'd wanted to send a message? What 'd I 'a' done then, hey?"

"You could n't have telephoned the office, I presume? Or asked anybody to tell me it was here? If these are ruined"—Dick tapped the box —"the Judge will be quite likely to wonder why you showed so much initiative."

"I tell you, I did n't have nobody to send," Milliken argued. "I did n't think 't was worth while to phone. You tell the Judge how it was. I don't want him to be sore at me. You tell him I did n't have nobody—" He was still protesting and explaining volubly when Dick shouldered the box and set off up the street.

Main Avenue and its continuation, Upper Main Avenue, ran the full length of the town. Its eastern end was unpaved, and dwindled into an uneven dirt road that followed the intricate windings of Squatter Creek. Toward the west it stopped at Border Street, on one corner of which the Grand View Hotel reared its three rickety stories. Between the hotel and the Four Corners, three short blocks away, was the business section, housed in squat frame and brick, and huddled together close to the narrow cement sidewalk. At intervals of about a hundred feet apart, the red-brick paving of the roadway gave out a hollow rumbling sound, whenever the iron-shod wheels of a wagon passed over it. Main Avenue was hot and dusty in summer, cold and slippery in winter, wet and chilly

between seasons; always disagreeable. There were a few small dispirited maple-trees lining the curb; one large elm, directly in front of the confectioner's shop known as "The Greek's," seemed to mark an oasis.

The Methodist and Lutheran churches, severe in dull-brown paint, led the way into the residential section, which had climbed up hill and down dale with a blissful disregard for the systematically geometrical destiny intended for it by old Simeon Randolph, for whom the town had been named. As if in revolt against the drab ugliness of Main Avenue, the streets which branched off from it made prompt promise of reform; and the farther one went from the Four Corners, the more effectively was it carried out.

Summit Street, which ran along the top of a gentle rise of ground some ten minutes' walk from "down street," was all that its name implied. Broad, tree-studded lawns of velvet smoothness sloped down to precise pavements. The road was of fine macadam, shaded by a double row of magnificent elms, the grave branches of which crossed and interlaced in an almost unbroken canopy of glossy green. Jigsaw ornamentation was frowned on here; and only one iron deer dared to show its amazing antlers on the whole street.

The Randolph place was at the corner of Hill

and Summit streets. It had been old when Judge Gordon Randolph was born. Long and low and rambling, its wide, unpainted boards weathered to a mellow gray, it seemed to have sprung naturally from the soil, to have grown in its place exactly as had the fine old elms that sheltered it.

"The day they tote me up Cemetery Street, Dick," Judge Randolph had said, about four years before, "I want you to move into my house. You 'll keep Miriam on to do for you." Miriam was the Judge's housekeeper. "Of course, she 's a vile cook, and she 's the temper and vocabulary of a Billingsgate fishwife,—whatever *that* is; Miriam 's got 'em, anyway. But she 'll keep you from being too comfortable, and that 'll be good for you. You won't dare kick to her, so you'll go out and kick to somebody else, no matter about what; you can always find something to kick about in Randolph. I 've pretty well stubbed the toes of my shoes on one thing and another, but they 're still stout and able. Maybe I 'd better leave 'em to you. There comes a time in every man's life when he has to take a stand; and when that time comes he 's got to kick to some purpose. If I have n't made a bad mistake in you, you 're the man who will do it. I 'd like to think you were going to step into my shoes, Dick; you 'd make much better use of 'em than I 've been able to."

At the time Dick had laughed and said he guessed it would be a good many years before he or any one else would step into Judge Randolph's shoes; the idea of death seemed infinitely remote from the man who was walking briskly along beside him. Dick's own splendid shoulders, young and straight, were no broader than those of the Judge, unbowed by the weight of sixty-eight years. The crisp brown head was barely level with the shaggy white one. The gray eyes were no brighter than the blue, but they were softer, less shrewdly calculating.

Despite careful teaching Dick had not then assimilated the whole of the Judge's golden rule of philosophy, which according to the old man's own phraseology was: "Do unto the other fellow what he 'd like to do unto you, if he had brains enough to think of it." The mouth of the younger man, too, although larger, was more tender, less stern. In the contour of the lips there was something almost feminine; but this suggestion was more than balanced by the aggressive chin and square, determined jaw. The nose, rather prominent, was well chiseled, and the ears were set close back against the finely shaped head. Dick Leighton was not handsome, but he had a good face, a strong face; and the build of his firmly knit young body was that of an athlete.

"Yes," the Judge had repeated musingly, "I 'll be mighty glad to have you step into my shoes, Dick. I 'll leave 'em to you, along with the house and Miriam, if she lives longer than I do, which is n't probable. She has a different kind of mis'ry every other day."

But Miriam, stout, red-faced, and hearty, opened the front door for Dick, when, the express package balanced on his shoulder, he rang the bell; while upstairs, in the great mahogany four-poster that had been in the Randolph family for four generations, Judge Gordon Randolph lay dying.

He was dying as he had lived—exactly as he wanted to. He argued with the doctor, and openly defied the nurse. He would die in his own way, undosed by any quacks, and unbossed by any young hussy hired for the express purpose of harassing his last moments on earth.

"Why, damn it all, sir," the old man rasped at Dick, who was the only visitor he would allow to be admitted, "she tells me I can't smoke, and tries to take my cigar away!"

That the effort had not met with conspicuous success, was evidenced by the black perfecto that the Judge was puffing furiously. Through the eddying swirl of pleasantly aromatic smoke, his eyes, clear and bright as the eyes of a child, gleamed steely blue. They and the bristling white brows

seemed the only live things about him. His skin had a strange grayish tinge; the flesh hung loosely on his big frame. His cheeks were sunken, and the hands that trembled against the counterpane were mere bony claws, etched with purple veins. He had never been a great smoker, and he had been quite well content to do without tobacco until the nurse told him he could have none. Thereafter he smoked incessantly.

"I 'll teach her who 's boss around here!" he barked at Dick. "Can't a man die in peace, eh? Jezebel!" It was his favorite expletive and had no reference whatever to the young woman in question.

"But, Judge, what she tells you is for your good," Dick urged pacifically. "And Doctor Evans is doing everything he can—"

"To send me to the lunatic asylum before I get to Cemetery Hill," the Judge cut him short. "Now *you* begin and help along the good work. What was that package you had?"

"From the nurseries, sir. Your order."

"Where did you get it? The four train is n't in yet."

"It came on the nine this morning. Ike said he did n't have any one to send over with it," Dick explained with a twinkle in his eyes.

The Judge waved his hand.

"Ike is the only human being ever born without a trace of brains," he said. "Go get it, will you?"

Dick brought up the package which he had left in the lower hall, severed the string, and took off the cover of the box. Within were nine dormant rose-trees, the roots caked with earth and rolled in newspaper.

"Good stock," grunted the Judge. "'With these nine columns round me, two and two, The odd one at my feet where Anselm stands'—" He grinned at Dick. "You 'll have to see to planting them. If they 'd come when I ordered them, I 'd have done it myself; but I 've shown you where they 're to go."

When Judge Randolph began his gardening operations in the cemetery, the town had been astounded and shocked. The idea that a man should plant flowers about his own grave, order and erect his own headstone, struck the conventional little community as not only fantastic but almost blasphemous.

Had the perpetrator of this remarkable deed been any but Gordon Randolph, radical steps would undoubtedly have been taken to curb his abnormal activities; but it had been a good many years since any one had been able successfully to interfere with any whim in which the Judge chose to indulge himself. Visitors to the quaint little cemetery on

the wind-swept hilltop were frequently diverted by the sight of the Judge, coatless, hat tilted to the back of his head, spade in hand, digging with a vigor and energy that belied his years.

The headstone, peeping out like a stiffly starched shirt front from between the lapels of the black alpaca coat, made the announcement that this was

THE RESTING-PLACE
of
GORDON RANDOLPH
Born, March 12, 1838
Died

"No, not the '*last* resting-place,' " the Judge had been wont to bark at any one questioning the accuracy of the stone-cutter who had carved the inscription. "*The* resting-place. And I 'm going to have it the way I want it."

But he had not been able to finish his work.

"You 'll do that," he said to Dick. "*Phlox sublata* over the top, with a border of sweet alyssum. And fill in the second date line. That 's all you 'll have to attend to—there." His keen eyes flickered with a glint like sun on blued steel. "Pull up that chair," he ordered abruptly. "This is the last chance I 'll have to talk to you, and I 've got to make the most of it."

Dick drew his chair closer to the bed, and the Judge, temporarily discarding his cigar, turned his head on the pillow so that he could study the young man's face.

"It 's over three years since I took you into partnership, Dick," he began; "nine since you first came to the office. In that time I 've come to know you pretty well, and most of what I know, I like. You 're clean, you 're clear-headed, you 're clever, you 're loyal, and you 're honest—enough. I like your ambition, too. I have n't a mite of patience with the fellow that sits around under the tree and waits for somebody to come along and climb after the fruit for him. You 've shinned up the trunk and picked plums for yourself."

Dick smiled.

"Don't you remember telling me that the best way for a man to get ahead was to use his boots, his hands, and his brains—and climb?"

"It 's not alone the best way: it 's the only way to get up the plum-tree," said the Judge. "But you want to watch out for rotten limbs, and for venturing out too far on small branches. If you 're not careful, one of 'em 'll break, and break *you*. Do you follow me?"

Dick nodded.

"There was that matter of the railroad," the Judge pursued. "It was a clear enough case; you

knew when you took it that you were on the wrong side. You won it, and you got a good fee, but you were skating on mighty thin ice. That contract you drew for Guinness had a joker in it. You put it in deliberately and you got away with it. Appleby's will was an outrage, but you were a good enough lawyer to make it water-tight. And there are other things—"

The Judge reached for his cigar and puffed at it for a moment. Then he put it down again.

"Yes, you 're a good lawyer," he said. "You 're a mighty good lawyer. And you 've made a good sheriff. That sink of iniquity downtown is cleaner than I can remember it 's being since the mills were built. But Jackson's place is still open. If there 's any trouble, it always seems to happen somewhere else. You 've closed two new saloons owned by men who compared with Cory Jackson are lilies of purity, and—Jackson still flourishes."

"But, Judge," Dick protested, "you 've just admitted that there 's never any trouble at Jackson's. Why should I bother him without good and sufficient reason? And you say yourself," he added defensively, "that loyalty is a good quality to cultivate. You would n't have me disloyal to my friends?"

The Judge shook his head.

"No," he said, "hardly. You stick by your friends, my boy. Some of them may be an abomination in the sight of the law, but they 're an ever-present help in time of trouble. It was Jackson who first suggested that you 'd adorn the office of sheriff, was n't it? Well, you could n't very well bite the hand that fed you; you can 't as long as it keeps itself covered, of course; and if it shows a bit of itself once in a while, you can be discreetly blind, as long as no one else is likely to see it. But that sort of thing is like the plum-tree, Dick. I mean, you can't sit on a branch, with one leg hanging on each side of it, and be sure somebody is n't going to grab you by the foot and haul you down. You 've got to stand square with yourself.

"You want to get ahead and you want to go quick. Well, you 've made big strides in the year since they elected you sheriff. You 're making money; you 're making a name. But you 've done some sailing that has been pretty close to the wind. I 'm not implying that you 've been crooked," he added at Dick's quick flush, "but you 've been—clever. Don't go out too far on *that* branch. Play the game as hard as you like and hit the other fellow first; but *hit* him—don't trip him up in the dark and hide behind the fence when the night watchman comes running to see who yelled. That 's Dave

Ainsworth's game; and besides, somebody 's liable to turn a flashlight on you."

Dick nodded abstractedly, then cast a quick glance at the Judge, who chuckled maliciously.

"Oh, I know you sized Dave up long ago, and you know that I know you did," he said. "You 're smarter than I was, a good deal. By the time I realized fully what sort of man Dave is, it was too late to do anything about it. We 'd let him get too strong. It would have meant a big fight, and there were reasons why I could n't go into it—then. And, after that I was too old. I was pretty sure I could n't finish it, so I just let things drift along, taking a kick now and then, with one foot or the other, sometimes with both, but mostly marking time. But that 's all right. What I 'd like to know is how many trips—business trips, of course—you've found it necessary to make to New York in the last three years, eh?

"Well," as Dick, embarrassed at this unexpected attack, made no reply, "that 's all right, too. Jean 's a fine girl; plenty of brains even if she does let her ideals run away with her common sense. She thinks right is right and wrong is wrong. Men are good, or they 're bad, just all black or all white, with no shades in between. She 's due for some heavy bumps when she finds out that she 's color-

blind. But she 's worth while. I liked her grit, too—going to study and work in New York, all by herself. For a youngster it 's a stiffish way; that 's why Dave did n't raise more hell about her going. He was n't any too well satisfied to have you see so much of her. If he knew you were figuring on marrying her some day, he 'd be mad clean through. Still,"—the Judge looked out of the window reflectively—"I don't suppose that 's the only reason why you should. She 's her mother's own daughter. But you want to remember that she 's Dave's daughter, too. What do you suppose she 's going to say to you, eh?"

" 'Yes,' I hope," Dick said coolly.

The Judge snorted.

"Numbskull! That 's not what I mean."

"Well, what do you mean, sir?"

The Judge picked up the stub of his perfecto again, found that it had gone out, and regarded it with some disfavor.

"Humph!" said he. "Cigars are n't what they used to be."

"You mean, sir—?" Dick persisted.

"I mean, sir, that there are just three things on earth by which Dave Ainsworth sets any store: his position, his son, and his daughter. All of 'em undoubtedly because they belong to him. Any man who tries to separate him from anything he regards

as his own—and that 's anything he wants—is in for a good day's work."

"Then you think he 'll object very strongly to—to—"

"To your marrying his daughter? Certainly! But not half so strongly as he will when he finds out you want his seat in Congress."

"His seat in Congress?" Dick echoed. "Oh, that 's all in the air. I 've heard rumors, of course; but even if they amounted to anything, I 'd want to talk to Jean first. I 'll have to get her point of view, and I mean to speak to her before there 's any chance of her hearing it elsewhere."

"Hm-m," said the Judge. "So you think there 's no likelihood of her hearing about it at home, for instance? How long do you suppose it 's going to take this breeze to blow up the street? You don't suppose that young hopeful of Dave's is blind and deaf, do you? The only reason Dave lets him hang around downtown is so that he can get a line on what 's in the wind there. Quick as he catches a scent he trots home with it. He 's done well for Dave in a good many ways, but mighty badly for himself. I tell you, Dick"—the Judge's thin lips were compressed—"if I had a son like Tommy I'd rather see him shovel coal for the devil than watch him deliberately cross the bridge over Squatter Creek. At least I 'd know he 'd reached the limit."

II

OLD Simeon Randolph had possessed a methodical soul. At his instance and insistence, the streets of the town which he had founded had been laid out in a pattern almost geometrically exact in its regularity, and given numerals instead of names. Old Simeon had believed sturdily in the future of the town. Until the day of his death, he had confidently predicted that it would one day be a great manufacturing and trading center. His son, Caton Randolph, the father of the Judge, had, however, cherished no such illusions.

"A poor imitation is worse than none at all," he had repeatedly declared. "We 're a town; we 'll never be anything else. Very well, then, let 's behave like a town, and stop trying to ape the cities." He it was who had introduced and carried through a resolution to name the streets, doing away with the numerals. He jeered down a motion to change the name of Squatter Creek to Silver River; "Malaria Brook" would be more suitable than anything else, he had declared. His one concession had been in the matter of Main Avenue.

"Hifalutin nonsense; why not Main Street, like

any other one-horse town?" he had grumbled, even while yielding the point. And he had directed that he be buried in the queer little out-of-the-way cemetery on the Hill, "because the devil can't find me there."

Your true native never spoke of the business section of Randolph as "downtown"; it was "down street." "Downtown" was used to designate that portion of the town that lay to the south of Squatter Creek, where the great steel-mills were. Some of the better class of citizens had scarcely set foot downtown; a good many mothers never thought of it without a shudder, and when they said their prayers included a petition that the Almighty would protect their sons against its contaminating influence.

Its streets were narrow; its houses were small and jerry-built, most of them of the same ugly pattern. They stood close together and close to the sidewalk, the cheap paint peeling from their slate-gray fronts, their steps and shutters sagging crazily. Some had tiny gardens, where a few pinched flowers straggled into anemic bloom; at some of the windows were curtains, looped back with bits of bright ribbon. But, for the most part, the only spots of color were at the corners, where saloons, garishly bright with plate-glass and mirrors, struck a note of gaiety that served to accentuate the somber gloom of the surroundings. Judge Randolph remembered when

there had been no buildings at all south of the creek; when "the Flats" had been green with swamp-grass and yellow with cowslips. Dick Leighton himself remembered when "downtown" had been a clean, if unprepossessing, part of the community. Now—

The young man nodded soberly at the Judge's words.

"I 'm rather fond of Tommy," he said, "and I 've been sorry to see the way he 's going. He used to be an awfully likable youngster. But ever since he flunked out of college he 's run wild, and he 's gotten pretty nearly insufferable. He needed careful discipline, good influences—"

"And he got tyranny and the crowd around Cory Jackson's bar," supplemented the Judge. "He did n't want to go to college, and Dave made him. He did want to go to work in New York, and Dave would n't let him. Every sensible idea he had of doing something for himself Dave warped and twisted until Tommy had no interest in it. Dave bossed him and bullied him until he lost what little backbone God gave him originally. He wanted to get out from under his father's shadow —somewhere where he 'd have a little light of his own—and the only place Dave would let him shine was over on the Flats. Jezebel! If Dave Ainsworth had an ordinary eye in his head, instead of a capital I, he 'd see what he did when he started an

information bureau out of a boy's natural curiosity."

"It 's a rotten shame!" Dick declared warmly. "I used to see him downtown once in a while, and I thought then that he was n't the sort of boy to fraternize with the bunch that hangs around there. Then he went off to college, and if he 'd stayed away he 'd have been all right. But he seems to be pretty much of a fixture now, and he 's more than just a sort of spy for Ainsworth. He 's always been a good mixer and a glib talker; he 's worked up quite a bit of influence. He calls all the boys by their first names, and he can drink and swear with any of them. I suspect that Jean will be a good deal more upset over the change that 's taken place in him during the past four years than over this Congressional business, which may or may not amount to something. At present it 's just talk downtown."

"Um-hm," rumbled the Judge. "Just talk downtown. But in a couple of months, Jean or no Jean, it 's going to let you in for the fight of your life, catch-as-catch-can, and no holds barred. You 'll have to stand or fall by yourself, and *you 'll need a damn clean record!*" He shot out the last words sharply and then leaned back on his pillows, looking frailer, grayer, more skeleton-like than ever. Only his eyes still burned with clear, indomitable fire. "I wish," he said almost regretfully, "that I

could stay and watch the thing out. It 'll be worth seeing. But I 'm past patching up."

"A complete change, Judge—sea air, might—"

"It 's no use steering a ship for the open sea when her boiler 's due to bust any minute," the Judge interrupted grimly. "I 've got one leg in the grave now, and the other is n't going gallivantin' to the seashore or the mountains or anywhere, except up Cemetery Hill. Never mind about me. I 'm going to die in my bed, as quietly as that fool of a nurse will let me. I 'm—well, I 'm pretty tired, Dick. I've lived all the days of my years and a few odd ones over, and I 've done my work. Sometimes I think I 've done part of it too well." The bushy brows converged and the furrow between them deepened. "I mean, as far as you 're concerned, Dick."

"Sir?"

"You 've been a pretty apt pupil, you know. You 've got a good head on your shoulders, but I 'm not altogether easy in my mind about you; I 'm afraid you 've learned your lesson too thoroughly."

Dick shook his head smilingly.

"I 've never really confused your principles with your sense of humor, sir," he said. "As a matter of fact, very few people in town do. You 've never succeeded in convincing them that you 're an unscrupulous cynic; your practice has n't trued up with your preaching."

The Judge's eyes fell away sheepishly from Dick's whimsical glance.

"Well," he said gruffly, fumbling under his pillow for a handkerchief, to cover his confusion, "it won't hurt you to remember that honesty *is* the best policy, although I suppose you 've never heard me say so before. It pays big interest, being honest. And," he could not help adding, "a reputation for being honest is better yet. You 've got the reputation. Hold on to it. Stand square with yourself. When you 're in the dark, keep still until you see light ahead. Then travel straight for it, no matter who or what gets in the way."

The door opened half-way; there was the glimmer of a white skirt in the hall.

"Get out!" shrilled the Judge. He grabbed a fresh cigar and shook it threateningly at the nurse. "Get out, do you hear? And don't you dare come back until I send for you!" He waited until the door had closed before he continued:

"This being clever, Dick, affects you a good deal the way liquor does: it creates an appetite. You put over one smart trick, and then you want to see if you can't turn one that 's just a little smarter. You tell yourself that you can stop any time, but the first thing you know, it 's got a hold on you that you can't break; it 's just like drinking rum. And if you don't

use discretion, you can do for yourself either way."

"I understand, sir."

"When I 'm tucked away in that nice little bed I 've made up for myself," the Judge said, "I can rest comfortably if I know your eyes and ears are open and that you 're taking an occasional squint at McAllister and Dave Ainsworth. They 'll both bear watching. Of course, McAllister 's just a blatherskite. He winds up his mouth and it goes off automatically, like an alarm-clock; the only way to stop it is to put your hand over it. He 's a nuisance, and he ought to be abated. He 'd be harmless enough, though, if it were n't for Dave. Dave 's got to thinking he 's the town, the county, and the State, all rolled into one bundle. Everybody kotows to him, and McAllister bows and scrapes and says, 'Yes, me Lord,' whenever he opens his mouth.

"Of course, he 's a strong man, Dick. He 's had things his own way so long that he 's got the notion there is n't any other way. When he finds out that you think differently, he 'll go after your scalp. If he can get anything on you, anything at all, he 'll use it for all it 's worth; and he won't sit up nights worrying over ethics, either. He 'd run a steam roller over his best friend if he could win by it. That 's Dave's idea of a fight: win it somehow, anyhow. He 's all self. And if you ever lock horns

with him, you 've got to remember that you can't bend him; you 'll have to break him. Make up your mind to that before you start anything."

The Judge was silent a moment, rubbing the back of one thin forefinger across his forehead.

"I 'm not leaving you any money, Dick," he said presently. "There won't be much, and it goes to my sister's children. If they 're anything like their mother I 'll regret it; but I 've got to take a chance that they 're not. They won't want the house or Miriam, and they won't get 'em, anyway. You get 'em—and the shoes. Sometimes I think we made a mistake when we sent Dave to Washington instead of Miriam. Jezebel! Put her in pants, and she 'd make an ideal Congressman! She has n't the brains of a gnat, and she never hears anything she does n't want to hear. But I 've taught her to leave my room alone, and she hates cats and Dave Ainsworth."

The Judge reached out a withered hand and laid it over the young man's firm brown one.

"You 'll make good," he said. "You 've got the stuff in you to be a big man. They 'll send you to Congress; I 'd like to be there to see it. It 's been a joy to watch you growing—growing. I—" the old voice faltered ever so little—"I 'm mighty fond of you, Dick; I 've loved you like a son. You were just the sort of boy I 'd always wanted—the sort I might have had if—she had n't married Dave.

Maybe I 've done you more harm than good—I don't know. But—"

The door opened again, wide this time, and the nurse came briskly into the room.

"I am sorry to turn you out, Mr. Leighton, but you 've already far over-stayed your time," she said. "I 'll let you know what time you may come to-morrow."

The Judge glared at her.

"He 'll come when he likes and stay as long as he likes!" he sputtered. "You—you—Jezebel! Whose house is this, anyway, yours or mine?" He put out a hand to Dick. "You 'll come early, won't you?"

"Of course," Dick promised. "I 'll see you by eleven, anyway."

But he was mistaken. It was barely eight o'clock when Miriam, a weeping, swollen-eyed Miriam, appeared at his rooms. She carried a brown paper parcel which she held out to Dick.

"The Judge, he says I 'm to bring you this as soon as ever he 's gone," she said, between sobs. "And he says you 'll be comin' to live at the house. I 'll have it clean for you, Mr. Dick. I 'll—oh, God love him, why—" She turned and fled, lumbering down the path with awkward steps, her apron to her eyes.

The parcel contained a pair of worn, square-toed shoes.

III

ALL that was conservative in the town of Randolph resented the Flats. In the first place, the presence of the big mills brought little if any revenue to the town. They were owned by outside capital, and their operatives, while of necessity resident, spent little or no money north of Squatter Creek. The offerings of mail-order catalogues held out a far more attractive lure than did the show-windows of the Full Value Department Store; and the Coöperative Grocery, receiving its stock in bulk from the mill corporation, was enabled to undercut local prices. The number of savings accounts at the Merchants and Mechanics' Bank was negligible, if not non-existent: the cash-register of Cory Jackson and his fraternity consistently absorbed any surplus wages. For the last five years of Judge Randolph's life, the shallow marshy bed of the creek had drawn as definite a line between the Flats and the Hill as Jean Ainsworth, in her innocently crude philosophy, drew between good and bad.

The two sections had, probably, but one mutual interest: their common allegiance to the political party which dominated that whole section of the

country and which was represented locally by David Ainsworth.

Ainsworth owned a large number of houses on the Flats, and was, perhaps, the only person in town not connected with the mills (Cory Jackson always excepted) to derive any substantial income from that source. He accepted the support of the workers in the same spirit as that in which he accepted their rents—as due him at certain specified times. Which was a very comfortable way of looking at it, but one to which exception could undoubtedly be taken. That Jackson himself had begun to question it, more or less openly, might have been regarded as significant if one took into consideration the fact that he was not only the owner of a prosperous saloon, but also that he and one or two others formed the hub around which the wheel of life on the Flats revolved.

The most important of Jackson's henchmen was Bill Murray, head teamster at the mills, and, next to Jackson himself, easily the most influential man downtown. Not even by the most ardent of his admirers had Bill ever been accounted handsome. His features were lean and saturnine. His mouth had a slant at one corner that gave his face a lopsided appearance, emphasized by the absence of the lobe of his right ear, which had been snipped off by a bullet intended to end his career.

Bill was always getting hurt. His muscular body

bore innumerable scars. He was known as a "trouble-maker," a somewhat unjust classification, since he himself never actually made trouble; he merely watched for it and, when he found it, plunged into it with joyous abandon. A fight, any kind of a fight, was as meat and drink to him. He could not see two school-boys scuffling, without edging toward them in the yearning hope that somebody might take up the quarrel of one or the other and thus give him a chance to "mix in."

He drank hard and steadily, but this habit had never once kept him away from his job at the mills. It was only when he had indulged too freely in his favorite form of recreation that he failed to punch the time clock at the usual hour.

His most recent injury was a knife thrust that had laid his left forearm open from elbow to wrist, narrowly missing an artery. The resultant loss of blood had weakened him a good deal, and the doctor, fearing possible complications, had ordered him to keep to his bed for a few days.

"Sure, I know who did it! I 'll lay for him some time when I 've got the use of my fin again and beat his head off," he told Dick cheerfully. "He had n't no call to use a sticker, anyways; it was just a friendly little fight." The "friendly little fight" had involved a dozen men, three of whom had required medical attention; but Bill was an

optimist. "Doc says I can go back to work Monday, so it won't be long afore I can fix the skunk," he added. "Doc 's a good sort, Leighton. You and him 's about the only reg'lar fellers on the other side of the creek"—he pronounced it "crick"—"as I can see. I could 've laid here till I rotted afore any the rest of 'em 'd come over. He 'll be in pretty soon. Jess, she 's gone home to see her mother, and the doc 's been mighty white. He 's a dam' good sort. The boys all like him."

It was not strange that Doctor Evans should be popular downtown as well as in the better district of Randolph. A homely little man, frank to the point of bluntness, sturdy, resolute, he went unhesitatingly when and where he was needed, answering the summons to attend a poverty-stricken farmer or laborer from whom he would never receive a penny, as promptly as he went to the house of, for example, Squire Moore. Rich and poor were all alike to him; his services were given as gladly to one class as to the other. If a patient could not pay for medicines, the little doctor had them charged to his own account. He was quick, resourceful, tireless. And he was afraid of nothing and nobody.

Bill Murray had reason to be grateful to him. On many occasions he had patched the teamster up, freely dispensing medicine and good advice. Bill

took the medicine and placidly disregarded the advice.

"He told me yesterday, Jess and me 'd ought to move. He says this place ain't fit for a pig to live in. And"—the crooked mouth twisted into a sardonic grin—"I tells him we ain't aimin' to keep pigs, Jess an' me ain't. Still, he 's more 'n two thirds right about the place; it *is* lousy, ain't it?"

Dick admitted that he had seen more desirable residences. Indeed, as he looked about him, he wondered that human beings could live in such abominable surroundings. There seemed to be absolutely no reason or excuse for the squalid dilapidation of the place. Built on the side of a hill, the house was one of four "three families," each less prepossessing than its fellows. Window-frames and door-casings leaned awry; ceilings were cracked and seamed; and great patches of plaster had fallen from them and from the walls. The sanitary conditions were shocking.

At the back the ground rose in a gradual slope to the summit of the low hill, from which, during every storm, the rain and drainage water ran down, collecting in numerous depressions and forming slimy mud that never really dried out. Refuse of every description—old clothes, broken bottles, tin cans, decaying vegetable matter—had been dumped indiscriminately. The whole block was a breeding-

place for disease, and the slightest reference to it was sufficient to arouse the ire of Doctor Evans, who considered, and had no hesitancy in openly declaring, that its existence was a disgrace to the town.

"I 've walked into this pest hole for the last time, Bill," he announced, when he appeared, just as Dick was about to take leave of Murray. "I 've done all the talking I propose to do; I mean to act."

"What are you going to do, Doc?" Bill wanted to know.

"You 'll see," returned the doctor grimly; and Cory Jackson, who had come in with him, grinned sympathetically at Murray.

"Doc 's got his back up, Bill," he said. "You an' Jess 'll have to hunt new quarters, I guess."

Evans turned to Dick.

"Have you ever seen such conditions in a supposedly civilized community, Leighton?" he demanded. "Why, they 're rotten—just simply rotten! The miracle is that an epidemic has n't started here long ago. If it ever does, it will wipe out the town. I 've talked and argued until I 'm black in the face, and not a thing has been done. Why, good heavens!"—the doctor was warming to his subject—"just suppose somebody came down with typhoid or smallpox. How long do you think it would take the contagion to spread? And how

could we deal with it? No hospital nearer than Cresston—and they won't take contagious cases there, anyway—the worst sort of housing conditions downtown here; no proper sanitation—why, the very thought of what may happen any day makes my blood run cold!"

"Does n't seem to be runnin' none too cold now, Doc," put in Murray, with a crooked smile.

The doctor whirled on him.

"If fellows like you would only help, instead of hindering, it would be more to your credit! But you 're away all day and half the night, and you don't care. As long as the place does n't fall down around your ears you 're satisfied. There are plenty of decent houses on the other side of the creek, owned by men with enough self-respect to keep 'em in some sort of repair; but you 're too lazy and slovenly to take the trouble to move! Suppose Jess came down with pneumonia, from standing on that damp, moldy kitchen floor. What would you do then, eh?"

"Take her to Dave Ainsworth's new hospital," returned Murray, promptly. "It 'll be done by the time she gets home; she 's goin' to stay in Cresston another two weeks, she says."

The saloon-keeper brushed away a grin with the back of his stubby hand.

"That 's what the hospital 's for, ain't it, Doc?"

he inquired gravely; "to look after the folks that have to live in Dave's rotten houses? Of course, you 'd think it would be cheaper to fix the houses and put in a drainage system; but maybe it would n't be so philanthropic. *I* don't know. I guess it 's a pretty wise guy that spends his money on big things that show up well.

"Of course," he went on, affecting not to notice the doctor's surprise, "most people think this block belongs to the Bolton estate, but title was passed to it six years ago. Dave mebbe has reasons for not havin' the deed recorded, but he owns it, all right; that 's why the agent for the estate don't mind your writin' him you 'll raise hell if he don't fix it up."

Jackson's bland and child-like smile added to the irritation of the doctor, who was aware that his fulminations must have furnished considerable amusement to those who knew him to be closely associated with Ainsworth in the plans for the new hospital. But his discomfiture lasted only a moment.

"I 'm not going to start an argument with you, Cory," he said. "It makes no difference who the owner is; it 's up to him to keep his property in repair. Since he does n't do it, it 's up to his tenants to teach him common sense, if not common decency, by clearing out and leaving his houses vacant. I 'll see Ainsworth to-morrow, and some-

thing will be done here, or I 'll know the reason why!"

"Oh, he 'll have a reason, Doc," Jackson said cheerfully. "Dave Ainsworth always has a reason for the things he don't do. Ain't he got a fine brand-new hospital just finished? Mebbe he don't want to see it stand empty. Or, again, mebbe he 's boostin' trade for you."

The doctor turned his back on him and again attacked the delighted Murray.

"I warn you!" he said wrathfully, "you can get chopped up as much as you like, and have every one of the ten plagues of Egypt in succession, and I won't set foot inside this place to save your life! That goes! As for Dave Ainsworth,"—he nodded fiercely over his shoulder at Jackson—"he 'll fix these houses, or I 'll have 'em condemned at the next meeting of the Town Board of Trustees. And that goes, too!" He stamped out.

"By jux! he means it, Bill," Jackson said, with deep satisfaction. "He 'll speak his little piece, and Dave 'll hem and haw and make excuses; and the whole thing will get an airin' that will cost Dave some votes on the Hill. You 'd better see about gettin' moved to-morrow."

"Have you found a place, Bill?" Dick inquired.

"Oh, sure. Right nice house, above the bridge. Jess, she 's buyin' new furniture for it in Cresston.

But we did n't want to move until the doc come over and got mad. Things has been so kind o' quiet, I was gettin' tired o' waitin' till we needed to send for him. But it 's all right now. You spoken to Dick, Cory?"

"Not yet. Guess he don't need more 'n a hint, though," drawled the saloon-keeper. "You know, Dick, some of the boys 've been wantin' to know if you 'd make a good Congressman. Told 'em I guessed you would. Like to talk it over when you got time." He reached into his hip pocket, and took out a villainous-looking pipe, the deep bowl of which he proceeded to fill. He struck a match on the leg of his trousers and applied the flame to the tobacco.

"Ought to—be—easy—enough," he said, between puffs. "And—good thing for you—mighty good thing. Think it over. Or—wait. I 'm goin' back to the joint now. Suppose you walk along with me." He gave Murray a breezy good-by, and followed Dick down the rickety stairs to the street.

"Of course," he went on, as he fell into step beside the young man, "this ain't any real news to you. It 's been in the air for some time now, and I never heard there was anything the matter with your nose. It 's a grand little chance, and you 're not the man to let such slip. I s'pose it 's

all right for me to see the boys and pass 'em the word to go right ahead, eh?"

Dick shook his head.

"No, Cory," he said. "Not yet. I—well, I have n't quite made up my mind. You 'll have to give me a little more time."

Jackson stared at him in undisguised amazement.

"More time? Have n't made up your mind? Why, man alive! what in the name of the sacred ring-tailed monkey is there for you to make up your mind about? You know, or you ought to know, that you can lick Dave Ainsworth, if you put your mind to it. I ain't sayin' it won't be some scrap; but you 're not afraid to buck him, are you?"

"Hardly!" said Dick, and laughed. No; he was not afraid of the fight, bitter though he knew it would be. Indeed, his blood fairly tingled at the thought of it. It would be no simple, trivial matter, but a real battle, in which brains and personality alone would count. Nor did he belittle the magnitude of the opportunities opening up before him.

But it was one thing to run in opposition to a man—any man—who was unsatisfactory to the rank and file of the voters, and it was quite another to come out against the father of the girl he loved.

He must lay the matter before her in its entirety,

and ascertain her views, before he gave to his supporters any definite decision.

"Well," prodded Jackson, "then what in the devil are you hesitatin' for? It 's all plain, open and shut. We 're goin' to fight Ainsworth, that 's sure; but it 's a big question whether any one but you can beat him. I don't know whether you know it or not, but I had a bit of a talk with Judge Randolph just before he took sick. He never thought much of me—you know *that*—but he talked to me. He was satisfied you could win, if you had the right backin'. He wanted you to win."

"Yes," said Dick, "I believe he did."

"Well, the Judge knew what he was about. He worked over you and groomed you, and got you all ready; and now you say you *ain't* ready! What am I to tell the boys?"

"Tell 'em what I 've told you: that I want a little more time to think it over."

The saloon-keeper shrugged.

"Oh, all right! If you don't know your own business, nobody else does, I guess. Only—well, never mind. Come on in a minute, will you?"

They had reached the corner, near the lower bridge, where the low brick building known as "Jackson's place" fronted the dirty street. Cory Jackson had never gone in for the ornate decoration with which unsuccessful rivals sought to lure his

trade away from him. Plate-glass, glaring electric lights, and brass trimmings were conspicuous by their absence. "Comfort," was his motto. "That 's what the boys want, and what I give 'em." He had been in the business long enough to know.

The main room was of good size and well lighted. The walls, done in an agreeable shade of green, held a number of pictures, the subjects of which made their appeal to a definite, if undiscriminating taste. The bar itself stretched across the entire end of the room opposite to the door; and there were several small tables, one littered with papers and flanked by easy-chairs. The floor was sanded. Jackson held that this, too, made for the comfort of his patrons.

As he and Dick stopped outside the swinging doors, the sound of a sudden commotion within came to their ears: a sharp warning cry, a volley of oaths, the thump and grind of heavy boots on the grit of the floor.

"Hell!" ejaculated Jackson.

Dick pushed open the doors and stepped into the room. At one end of the bar a crowd of men ducked and jostled, each intent on getting behind somebody else. The middle of the room was vacant, save for the swaying figure of a huge Swede. The man was waving a revolver back and forth between the panicky crowd and the other end of the

bar, over which the close-cropped head of the bartender, Bud McFee, showed at extremely brief intervals, as he raised it up to express an instalment of his unqualified opinion of the creator of the disturbance. The Swede's eyes were filmed and hazy; his face was darkly red. He was very drunk indeed.

"Look out!" yelled the bartender, catching a glimpse of the two men at the door. "He 's crazy as a bedbug! He 'll plug you sure!"

The Swede swung unsteadily round and found himself confronted by the sheriff.

"You ban get out!" he roared. "You—"

"Oh, shut up, Olsen," Dick said pleasantly. "You 're making a lot too much noise. And here—give me that pop-gun before you hurt somebody with it."

The Swede blinked at him uncertainly; the barrel of the revolver wavered toward him. There was a tense silence; no one moved; the crowd seemed hardly to breathe. Then:

"Come across," Dick said, still pleasantly. "You 're making an awful fool of yourself, you know."

He held out his hand, and, after a second of hesitation, the Swede meekly put the revolver into it. Dick shoved the weapon into his hip pocket. "Now go home and sober up," he ordered. "Don't

stand there looking like a sick sheep; clear out! You 're drunk."

"Ah ban all right," mumbled the man. "Ah ban all right, Ah tell you." But he went, nevertheless, and a sigh of relief stirred through the room when the doors swung shut behind him.

Dick turned to the bartender.

"What 's all this, McFee?" he demanded sharply. "You know better than to sell liquor to a man with a jag like that!"

"He did n't get it here; honest to Gawd he did n't, Dick," protested the barkeeper anxiously. "That was what all the row was about. He come in here and hollered for booze, and I would n't sell him none. Then he pulls a gun and says he 's goin' to shoot up the whole works."

"That 's the truth, Dick," came in a chorus. "It 's just like Bud says."

"All right. Next time he comes in, Bud, you tell him I want to see him, will you?"

"I 'll do it. And, say,"—the barkeeper's eyes went to Jackson, who nodded—"I cal'late this calls for a little somethin' on the house. What 'll you have, gentlemen?"

Under cover of the general move forward, Cory Jackson spoke to Dick in a low tone.

"How about a few minutes in the den, eh, Dick?

One or two of the boys are in there, and this looks like a good time to drop a hint or so."

But Dick shook his head decidedly.

"I want two weeks more," he said. "Then I 'll know, and I 'll let you know. Leave it at that, please."

Before two weeks were up he would have seen Jean, talked with her. Until he knew just what her views were, he could and would do nothing.

IV

THE front door slammed. Heels clumped noisily up the stairs and along the polished parquet of the hall; and the door of David Ainsworth's study was pushed open with such force that it swung back against the wall with a crash.

The Congressional Representative for the Second District was tall and rather sparely built. He carried himself impressively, as if aware of his importance in the eyes of the townspeople. In his younger days, there had been a certain hearty cordiality in his manner, a certain shade of benevolence in his smile, which, as he became every year more and more assured and self-centered, had gradually disappeared, giving place to a stiffly dignified bearing, an aloof reserve, which demanded that he be regarded and approached with a degree of deferential respect. His clean-shaven face, thin-lipped, rather narrow at the cheek-bones, was austere in color and expression. His eyes were a cold, impenetrable blue—hard surfaces that reflected no shadow of emotion. It was not his way to show emotion. He regarded it and condemned it as weakness.

At his son's noisy entrance, he looked up with an annoyed frown.

"What do you mean by coming into my study that way?" he demanded sternly. "This is not Jackson's saloon."

The boy's lips, parted for eager speech, compressed. He slouched to a chair beside the desk and flung himself into it.

"Oh, all right," he said sullenly. "I 'm sorry. I was in a hurry."

Ainsworth was in no way mollified. He pushed aside the papers on which he had been working, and contemplated his son with cold displeasure.

"Tommy," he said, "do you know that you 're drinking too much? I 've noticed lately that—"

"Aw, rats!" Tommy interrupted roughly. "Of course I 've been drinking! Do you think I can hang over a bar half the night and not drink? How much use would I be, do you suppose, if I ordered ginger-pop and barley water?"

"It 's not necessary to make a beast of yourself! Understand me, Tommy; I won't have it. If you can't drink—"

Tommy interrupted again, rudely:

"Never mind the temperance lecture now, please! This is n't the time and I 'm not in the mood for it, so stow it! There 's something a lot more important than my habits to be discussed."

The insolence of the speech was so incredible that, for a moment, Ainsworth was at a loss for words. Then a second and more searching glance at his son's face showed him that the boy was under strong excitement and, further, that he was in no condition to be reprimanded.

Tommy was not exactly drunk, but he was certainly not sober. There was a bloodshot glaze over his eyes and a smolder under them. His usually clear skin was darkly flushed, and here and there mottled with hot patches of red. He kept moving his hands nervously, twisting his fingers together and every now and then running them through the rumpled disorder of his fair hair. The strong light from the reading-lamp on the desk showed in his face lines that should not have been in the face of a boy barely twenty-one; showed, too, the pouchiness of the flesh under the eye sockets, and revealed the unsteadiness of the lips, the slight muscular quivering of the weak chin.

"Well?" he demanded with a truculence born half of the liquor he had drunk and half of his excitement; "do you want to talk, or shall I?"

Ainsworth curtly motioned him to speak, and he hitched forward, his eyelids snapping rapidly up and down.

"Well," he said, "there 's a sweet-scented job on foot, one that 'll make you anxious to finish the

hospital so that you can put a few picked patients into it. That bunch down there"—he jerked his thumb over his shoulder—"are planning to run Dick Leighton for Congress!"

The tension of Ainsworth's pose relaxed; he leaned back in his chair and smiled.

"My dear Tommy," he said, "that is a most wildly improbable tale."

"Is it? Well, if the job comes off, don't say I did n't warn you. If you 'd been in Jackson's to-night and heard what I heard, maybe you would n't be so easy about it."

"Just what did you hear?" Ainsworth was still smiling; the idea that Dick Leighton or any other man could be considered in connection with the Congressional nomination, was too preposterous to be taken seriously; but he felt that Tommy should have a hearing. "Just what did you hear?" he repeated, caressing his chin with his long fingers.

"Well, I heard Bud McFee say that when an old cow stopped giving milk she was no use in a dairy herd, and that it was time to give her stall to some promising young heifer; that 's one thing I heard."

"And what," inquired Ainsworth, "has that to do with me? What is the connection?"

"Also," Tommy proceeded, without answering the question, "I heard that speeches did n't purify a river, nor promises build a post-office."

"Ah!" said Ainsworth. "But I explained—"

"They seemed to think that explanations were n't very effective dredges," interrupted Tommy. "They 're sore, the whole bunch of 'em, sore as scalded pups. It was six years ago that you promised to get an appropriation for a new post-office building, and they claim you have n't done any more about that than you 've done about getting the Squatter Creek proposition into the Rivers and Harbors Bill—and you were on the committee, too."

"But these things can't be done in a minute," Ainsworth said in annoyance. "They ought to understand that it takes time—"

Tommy interrupted again.

"You don't have to argue with *me*, you know, Dad," he said. "I don't give a whoop in Hades whether we get a new post-office or not, and the creek can be solid mud for all I care; *I* don't have to live on the Flats. I 'm just telling you what Cory Jackson and his crowd think about it. Have you seen 'The Banner of Red' lately?"

"Hardly. My time is too fully occupied for me to waste it in reading trash calculated to appeal only to the lowest intelligence. Tommy, I am neither an ignorant foreigner, nor a citizen who thinks that the world owes him a living for which

he is unwilling to work. The paper you mention has no standing whatever."

Tommy shrugged.

"It has n't?" he said. "Well, maybe not; and maybe it is 'calculated to appeal only to the lowest intelligence.' But—damn it!— is n't that the intelligence of the average voter? Dad, you 're looking at conditions as they were here when you first went to Congress. They 're different now—altogether different. And 'The Banner' has more influence than Sam McAllister's paper will ever have in this world. For one copy of 'The Register' sold down the valley there are twenty of 'The Banner.' I picked up a couple and looked 'em over, the other night. There 's an editorial in the last issue about the drainage business; and there 's a whole column about the post-office. They want to know why, if Cresston gets forty-five thousand dollars for a new building, Randolph gets nothing but hot air. And all through the paper, stuck in between paragraphs and among the advertisements, there are cute little slams at you: 'If you 're afraid of getting typhoid, don't bother your Congressman about getting Squatter Creek dredged. He lives on a bluff.' 'Do we send Ainsworth to Congress for his health, or ours?'—things like that. And then there 's one that reads: 'If a sheriff will fight for the good of his county at home, would n't he

fight for it in Washington?'—or something of the kind.

"I know those are just little things, but they stack up; and they gave me a hint. I started to nose around. And what they're saying down at Jackson's is just a sample of what they're spreading all over the district. But that doesn't so much matter. Randolph swings the county and the county swings the district. What's going on right here in town is the thing to steer by. And I tell you,"—Tommy slapped the arm of his chair with his open palm—"Jackson and his bunch have got their little tomahawks out, and they're going on the war-path with the whole tribe behind 'em."

The smile had faded from David Ainsworth's face.

"Tommy, are you sure of what you're talking about?" he asked. "Granting that Jackson and that roughneck crowd of his intend to make us trouble, do you actually believe we have anything to fear from them?"

"I don't believe it; I *know* it! If they don't run Leighton next term, it will be because he withdraws his name. Which is very likely—I don't think! Oh, he's smart! He's got Murray and McFee and Cory Jackson—all the men with influence downtown—eating out of his hand. They think he's the only thing that ever happened, and they'll

do anything he tells 'em to. How much real trouble has there been over there since he 's been sheriff? Not a darned bit! He 's got 'em all buffaloed! Why, did n't he walk right up to a big drunken Swede who started to shoot up the whole shebang, the other day, and take his gun away from him? And did n't the Swede let him do it?"

"If this is true," Ainsworth said with ominous calm, "we 'll give Mr. Leighton something to think about on his own account."

Tommy understood the implication.

"Oh, *words* won't make any difference to him," he shrugged. "What does he care for 'The Register'? Nobody downtown would believe anything McAllister said against him; he 's too popular. And he 's pretty well liked around here, too. Squire Moore told Clark Jenkins in the post-office the other day that Leighton was by all odds the best sheriff the county 'd ever had, and that he, for one, expected big things of him. With the mill district solid, and the Hill divided—well how does it look to you?"

Ainsworth's eyes had narrowed; his lips were pressed tightly together. It was fully five minutes before he spoke. Then:

"Has McAllister any idea of what is going on?" he asked.

"Sam McAllister never had an idea in his life, unless somebody drilled a hole in his head and blasted out some of the solid ivory. You 've had everything your own way so long that all he thinks he has to do is to talk wise and doll himself up to look pretty to the ladies. A pink tea is about his speed, and we 're in for a fight—a *fight*, do you understand, Dad?"

"We shall be ready for it."

"And that is n't all. There 's Jean."

"What 's that?"

"Oh, he 's been playing around New York with her."

"Jean?"

"Sure. One of the Cummings boys was there on business for the old man, and saw 'em, Leighton and Jean, strolling down the street together as chummy as you please. I should think she would have more sense. It 's a good thing the hospital 's about done," Tommy added maliciously; "you 'll have her home pretty soon where you can keep an eye on her."

Ainsworth ignored this.

"See McAllister in the morning," he ordered crisply, "and have him come over here at eleven o'clock. I 'm inclined to think that you 've exaggerated the importance of this, but it will do no harm to look into it. But if it is true, if Leighton

actually does contemplate such a trick, he 'll regret it."

"We 'll get his pelt," Tommy nodded, "but we 've got to get busy. The gall of him! Can you beat it? Well—" He yawned noisily, stretched his arms above his head, and rose, a little unsteadily. "Me for bed," he said. "Good night, Dad."

Ainsworth detained him a moment.

"Tommy, you 've done a good piece of work tonight," he said, "and I want you to know that I appreciate it. Whether or not there is any foundation for this seemingly improbable idea of yours, it shows at least that you are keeping your eyes and ears open. You are getting to be of real help to me, my son, a valuable assistant."

High praise, this, and Tommy straightened up with a thrill of gratified pride.

"I 'm awfully glad that you 're pleased, Dad," he said earnestly. "And I 'm going to be of more help, too; you 'll see. I 've got a bit of influence myself downtown; the boys 'll listen to me now. Most of 'em seem to like me pretty well, too. If there 's anything to be done, you can count on me." He started for the door, paused, came slowly back.

"This business about Leighton seeing Jean in New York," he said. "Jean 's my sister, and I 'm mighty fond of her. I don't half like her meeting

the pup. Of course, she does n't realize what he is—"

"She will," Ainsworth assured him. "I should n't worry about that part of it, if I were you, Tommy. Probably the meeting was entirely accidental. Jean is your sister, but"—he smiled with true Ainsworth arrogance—"she is also my daughter. The idea that she would ever consider Leighton except as an inferior, is pure nonsense."

V

IN a small town the lines of caste are often only vaguely defined; nevertheless, they exist. And the Ainsworths had always been on a higher social plane than the Leightons.

Dick's own people, while of good stock, had always been poor. He had been orphaned while still in high school, and had found it difficult to complete his course. Had it not been for Judge Gordon Randolph, he probably would have been unable to finish it at all. But the Judge had taken an interest in him, put him in the way of making a little money from time to time, and upon his graduation had given him a chance to read law in the dingy little office with the stained and splintered floor where for three generations the Randolph men had maintained the prestige of the name on the small black-lettered sign.

At first Dick had swept out, dusted, run errands answered the telephone—and studied. Then he had filed papers, typed letters and briefs, looked up references—and studied. Later, under the Judge's tutelage, he had prepared a few cases, written a brief or two, and assumed the full duties of confidential

assistant. He kept on studying, and, after having been nearly five years with the Judge, passed his bar examinations.

"So far, so good," Gordon Randolph had said to him when he presented the report of the examiners. "You 've made a good start, Dick, but it 's only a start. Don't get the notion that you know all the law there is, just because a few muddleheads have seen fit to license you to rob people legally. You don't know a thing—understand?—not a thing. Go ahead on that assumption, and maybe you 'll get somewhere."

Dick had continued to act as the Judge's assistant, and he had kept right on studying. He had always been ambitious, but until about his twenty-fifth year, his desires had centered on no definite object; he had possessed but the haziest conception of his ultimate goal. Jean Ainsworth's departure for New York, to take up a course of study in one of the large hospitals, had stimulated him to more concentrated and analytical thought, had brought home to him the realization of how conspicuously she loomed in his scheme of things.

He and the daughter of the Congressman had grown up together, and habit has a treacherous way of masking important things with a veil of the commonplace. Jean, living in Randolph, within ten minutes' walk of his own home, or even more quickly

accessible by telephone, had seemed altogether a different Jean from the girl from whom he was separated by hundreds of miles. Different, and infinitely desirable. It was then that the haze had cleared, and he had recognized his ambition to be threefold: money, position—Jean Ainsworth. If he could secure the first two, he would have at least a fighting chance for the third, the all-important. Without Jean nothing really counted.

Money? He knew that as Judge Randolph's partner and successor, he could make money. Position? The word, to him, involved power, the power to move men, to speak with the voice of authority in public affairs, to be a leader rather than a follower. He meant to succeed; and from the moment that he realized clearly what it was that he wanted, his thoughts and energies were bent in that direction and that only.

He was popular downtown; "the boys" all liked him. His election to the office of sheriff had been practically unanimous. David Ainsworth had regarded him in the light of an inoffensive young man who, later on, might be useful and amenable to suggestions, if rightly put; and had therefore offered no opposition to Dick's candidacy. In Randolph, the residential section, known as "The Hill," was decidedly conservative. It set its face against any change that seemed at all radical, accepting, almost

without question, the opinions formulated for it by David Ainsworth. Ainsworth's dignity, his impressive arrogance appealed to its habit of thinking, if its sheep-like following of the Congressman's lead, as indicated through the medium of McAllister's newspaper, "The Register," could be called thinking.

"The Register," owned, published, and largely written by Samuel McAllister, wore the garments of Esau, but its voice was unmistakably the voice of Jacob. Nobody paid any serious attention to "The Banner of Red." "The Banner" went in for sensationalism, and was notoriously careless in its statement of facts. Its spelling, too, was apt to be original, and in any difference of opinion "The Register" made use of that most deadly of all weapons, ridicule.

More than once, when "The Banner" had been absolutely right and "The Register" wrong, McAllister had merely dilated on the absurd typographical errors in the smaller paper, thus craftily calling attention to the form and diverting it from the substance of the article. He had not even deigned to comment on the paragraph which Tommy Ainsworth had called to the Congressman's notice, and consequently, the Hill, which regarded with lofty scorn "The Banner," and all that was printed therein, remained in more or less complete ignorance of the

growing state of unrest that existed throughout the district, and more particularly "downtown."

In this section David Ainsworth was not well loved. The disgraceful condition in which for years he had kept his real-estate holdings there, had not endeared him to his tenants, who, even if they were too ignorant or too apathetically indifferent to rebel openly, were far from regarding their landlord with kindly esteem. They supported him at the polls because there had never been any organized opposition to him, but they made no particular effort to conceal their personal dislike of him, even from his son, who, after the fashion of boys the world over, had begun, coincidently with his accession to long trousers, to visit some of the saloons where the mill-hands congregated.

Tommy labored under the familiar delusion that to indulge in dissipation is to establish one's right to be styled a man; and the mill workers, recognizing the boy's eager desire to make friends with them, good-naturedly accepted him. He did not attempt to patronize them; he was frankly interested in their doings and almost pathetically anxious that they should regard him as one of them. They tolerated him; they allowed him to mingle with them; but only as "Tom," a harmless youngster, and never as the son of David Ainsworth.

Ainsworth, on his part, looked with scorn on all

the workers of the district south of Squatter Creek. In his own mind he referred to them contemptuously as "scum." And, while he was too shrewd to express his opinion, or allow it to be actually manifest, some of them knew it, and every issue of "The Banner" was telling it to those who, while perhaps slow to assimilate new ideas, are nevertheless tenacious of opinions once formed.

There was more than one person in Randolph who believed, and did not hesitate to state, that the hospital nearing completion on the summit of Maple Hill, and heralded by "The Register" as "a magnificent example of the princely philanthropy and altruism of our first citizen, the Honorable David Ainsworth," was being built, not because Randolph needed a hospital, not because the poor and needy could there receive aid, for the lack of which they might otherwise have suffered and died, but solely because David Ainsworth had seen an opportunity to glorify himself while throwing a sop to those disposed to criticize him. The Ainsworth Hospital would be a lasting monument to the nobility of the man who, in the greatness of his unselfish love for his fellow-creatures, had erected it—on a site formerly occupied by buildings which a complaisant Town Board of Trustees had reluctantly advised him it would have to condemn as unfit for human occupancy.

Instead of being grateful to its "first citizen" for his public-spirited benevolence, downtown Randolph was inclined to be resentful. "The Banner" was bitter. Dick Leighton was tolerantly amused. He did not know exactly how Jean felt about her father's project; but, at any rate, she was coming home, and that was enough for Dick. She was coming back to Randolph, where he could be with her every day, instead of seeing her once or twice a year for the briefest of brief periods.

VI

TOMMY AINSWORTH was not exactly envious of his sister; but he was more than a little aggrieved that she should have been allowed to go her own way while he was obliged to submit to the conditions his father imposed on him. Just before his twentieth birthday he had returned home from college; which is not to say that he had received his degree. His sojourn in the halls of learning amounted in all to something less than a year, and his departure therefrom was regretted by no one save a few boon companions who lamented the loss of a spirit peculiarly apt in the conception and practice of various forms of undergraduate devilry.

At nineteen the average boy knows virtually all there is to be known, especially if he has spent nearly a year in college. There are few matters which he does not feel himself competent to discuss, few discoveries which he has not considered and dismissed. Indeed, there is left in the world so little knowledge of which he is not complete master, that he feels himself wearied of life and living. His chief wonder is how he is going to get through the weary years

ahead, when he has already exhausted every interesting possibility.

Tommy Ainsworth was perhaps even a little more cock-sure of himself than is the average boy. He knew that he was blasé, that life had really nothing new to offer him in the way of sensation and experience. He was a man of the world; he felt that he was rapidly becoming a cynic.

He himself was not in the least concerned, either because he had "flunked out," or on account of the not too flattering opinion the faculty held of his habits, aims, and conduct—an opinion expressed at some length in a letter written by the Dean to David Ainsworth. Tommy's own explanation of his failure to pass his examinations in more than one subject, was that it made his head ache to study. The Dean seemed to feel that possibly young Mr. Ainsworth's deplorable malady was due to causes other than a too rigorous application to his books, and that the knowledge acquired by him—if any—was not of the sort prescribed in the curriculum of the university.

David Ainsworth had been rather more lenient with the boy than might have been expected in the circumstances; but it was a lenity that was more apparent than real.

"I can't say I think the past year has been a credit to you, Tommy," he said. "But the mischief

seems to have been done, and there 's no good going into it. The question now is, what of the future? What do you propose to do?"

Tommy's reply had been prompt and explicit.

"Go to work! Masters's father has gotten him a corking job in New York, and there 's an opening for me with the same concern. Masters said it would be a wonderful chance for me, if you 'd only use your influence. That 's what I 'd like to do, Father—go to work in New York."

But to use his influence to get his son a position in New York, or even to give his consent to Tommy's going, was something that David Ainsworth had flatly and uncompromisingly refused to do. There were other universities. Tommy must matriculate at one of these and study hard. Of course, it was unfortunate that he had lost a year; still, if he applied himself earnestly, he could make up the time.

Tommy did n't want to go to any other university, and he argued that if his father insisted it would mean merely another wasted year. There was no reason to suppose that his head would ache less if he studied in one place than in another, was there? Well, then, why not let him go to New York?

But Ainsworth was adamant. If Tommy wanted to work, then let him work in Randolph.

Tommy accepted his defeat, and also the clerkship his father found for him in the Merchants and

Mechanics' Bank. The exactions of the position were not unreasonable; but at the end of two months Squire Moore, the president, was obliged, unwillingly enough, to inform Ainsworth that he feared Tommy was not fitted for the work.

"Took him a long time to find it out," was Tommy's blithe comment. "I knew it the first day I was there. Now will you let me go to New York, Dad?"

"No," said his father, "I will not. You 're going to stay in Randolph. We 'll find you something to do here."

And Tommy had stayed. A suitable opening not immediately presenting itself, he had idled about and, having early exhausted the attractions of Main Avenue, had in the natural course of events gravitated downtown. He had a not unpleasing personality; there was something infectious about his wide, cheerful smile, something winning in his boyish charm of manner. He renewed old acquaintanceships and formed new ones. He listened with respectfully eager interest while the crowd around Cory Jackson's bar dealt with and settled cosmic affairs. Once or twice, when local matters were descended to, he reported the discussions to his father, who gave him an attention that surprised and delighted him. Thereafter, as if by tacit agreement, the subject of a position was relegated to the back-

ground and finally dropped altogether. Tommy became the finger by which David Ainsworth felt the pulse of the Flats.

To the boy of twenty years, it was thrilling sport to loiter about the mill district, ostensibly with nothing on his mind but the killing of time in good company, while he was really acting as the zealous guardian of his father's interests. He would be the unknown and unsuspected power behind the throne, the wily god out of the machine. He was greatly flattered that his father should impose so much trust in him, charge him with so great a responsibility. And, before very long, he came to have some little influence among his associates. He knew it, and was proud of it. What he did not know, however, and what David Ainsworth for all his shrewdness was too myopically self-centered to see, was that the influence he exercised was, except superficially, overshadowed by that which was exerted over him.

Jean suspected that something was amiss. In his letters she had detected a different note, a certain cheap boastfulness that was not mere boyish swagger. It troubled her greatly; but Jean had not seen him for over three years, and did not understand how great was the alteration in him; the only person who really appreciated it was Mary Nestor.

Miss Nestor was Mrs. Ainsworth's only sister, a quiet little woman, with soft brown hair plenti-

fully threaded with gray, and brown eyes, mild and kindly. A capable, efficient manager, she had administered the domestic affairs of the household ever since the death of Alice Ainsworth, when Jean was fifteen and Tommy ten years of age. She had tried conscientiously to take the mother's place, and in so far as it is possible for any one to do this she had succeeded.

Jean's affection for her was deep and sincere. Tommy was fond of her; indeed, he loved her in an off-hand sort of way; but he was a little contemptuous of what he termed her "old fuss-cat notions," nor was he always as courteous as he might have been. To her gentle remonstrances in regard to the increasing carelessness of his habits, his coarsening speech and manners, he paid no attention whatever; he was not so much indifferent as he was impatient of her "interference." His return on three consecutive evenings considerably the worse for liquor, brought to a head her resolve to point out to her brother-in-law certain facts to which he seemed strangely blind.

She chose the middle of the afternoon, when Tommy had left the house for his usual stroll down street. Then she descended to the library, where Ainsworth sat glancing through the latest copy of "The Register." The library was the pleasantest room in the house. There was nothing pretentious

either in its proportions or in its furnishings; but there was about it an air of comfortable simplicity, the air of a room that is lived in and enjoyed. The walls were lined with open book-shelves, built breast-high; at one end yawned a deep-throated fireplace, its bricks dulled to a mellow tone. A row of French windows at the back afforded a glimpse of a charming garden, in which all summer long old-fashioned flowers made a riot of colorful bloom. David Ainsworth himself preferred the more luxuriously appointed study on the second floor, but Jean had always loved the library. And everything had been arranged just as she had been accustomed to see it, even to the great bowl of long-stemmed red roses on the mantel-shelf.

"By this time to-morrow afternoon Jean will be with us, David," Miss Nestor began, drawing up a low chair beside the table, and balancing her work-basket on her knees while she got out her thimble and darning-materials. "It will be so nice to have her home again. And I'm very glad Tommy is looking forward to it. He spent hours this morning polishing up his roadster, so that it will look nice when he drives to the station to meet her to-morrow. I was relieved to notice how eager he is to see her. She can do anything with him, you know; and I feel that he really ought to be taken

in hand. You know, David, I 'm worried about that boy."

"Eh?" Ainsworth glanced up. "Worried about Tommy? Why, what 's the matter with him? You mean he 's not well?"

"No; his health is all right now, as far as I know. But if he keeps on drinking, and coming home at all hours of the night, it won't be very long. It seems to me that something ought to be done about it. No less than three times this week he 's come home after midnight, and once, at least, he was n't himself. I 'm very much worried about him. Nothing I can say does any good. He takes the attitude that it 's none of my business, and the more I try to reason with him the worse he gets. I wish you 'd speak to him, David."

Ainsworth lowered his paper and frowned at her over the top of the drooping pages.

"I don't quite understand your attitude in regard to Tommy, Mary," he said, in a tone of suppressed annoyance. "Suppose he does stay out late once in a while, or take a social drink or two. It does n't necessarily mean that he 's on the brink of the pit, as you seem to think."

"I don't think so, David; that is n't what I meant, at all. And I don't want you to get the impression that I have narrow, prudish ideas about him. I

love to see him happy and enjoying himself; and if he did n't take more than one or two drinks occasionally, I don't suppose they 'd hurt him. But, David, Tommy has changed." Her sweet face was very serious. "He 's coarsened; his manners are different. When he comes in, he 's rough and boisterous. He behaves as if he were in a barn instead of a house."

Ainsworth smiled, the tolerant smile of a man who, seeing the absurdity of the argument, and knowing that he has all the best of it, makes due and generous allowance for his opponent's dullness.

"High spirits," he said. "You 're making a mountain out of a mole-hill, Mary. Those are just trivial things."

"In themselves, yes," she agreed. "But they 're indications of a general lowering of his standards. He seems to have lost something—I can't exactly define it, but something of that quality that made him such an attractive, lovable boy."

"That 's just it, Mary; he 's not a boy." With the tip of his forefinger, Ainsworth tapped the newspaper. His toleration expanded into rare affability. "You 've forgotten to let him grow up! Tommy 's a man, and he 's proving it more conclusively every day. He 's of inestimable help to me. Why, I 'd hardly know what to do without him."

Miss Nestor deftly turned a black silk sock wrong

side out and drew it over her hand, spreading out her fingers in first the heel and then the toe. Finding no work there for her needle, she picked up the other one of the pair.

"But do you think it 's wise, David, to let him help you the way he does?" she asked.

"Certainly! Why not?"

"There 's his future to be thought of. He 's twenty-one now, and he has n't any definite aim at all. When you sent him to college, you were going to have him study for the bar. Then he failed in his examinations that first year, and you told him he 'd either have to go to some other university, or go to work here in town. He has n't done either one. He—"

"He 's gone to work for me; and he 's doing very well indeed, Mary."

"But is he getting anywhere?" she persisted. "Is he accumulating any knowledge or experience that is going to be worth anything to him later on when he does go into business? He seems to idle around all day, just wasting time. He may be able to help you a little, but he 'll never make a secretary or a really able assistant." She knew whereof she spoke. Tommy regarded a pen with disfavor and a typewriter with contempt. He was not of the timber from which efficient secretaries are made. "You could easily hire some one to

assist you, and have Tommy do something that would at least start him in the right direction. There really *does n't* seem to be much for him here in Randolph. Perhaps if you let him go to New York—he 's always wanted to, you know—he 'd get interested and be more ambitious."

"He 's not going to New York," Ainsworth said shortly.

"You can't mean him to go on indefinitely this way? Is n't he to take up a profession—make some sort of a career for himself?"

Never before had she ventured to prolong a discussion which her brother-in-law so obviously wished to end. She was astonished at her own temerity; but the point seemed of vital importance to her, and she clung to it determinedly, in the face of Ainsworth's ominous frown.

The Congressman was irritated at her persistence, the more because of the justice of her complaint. Tommy *was* drinking too much, as he himself had recently warned the boy. But his affairs in the district were assuming an increasingly critical aspect; and he regarded it as of vital importance that Tommy should for the present be unrestricted. When the crisis was over, he would take the matter in hand. Meanwhile, he considered Miss Nestor's apprehension unwarranted, and as something of a reflection on himself.

"I have n't lost sight of anything, Mary," he said. "Tommy's future will be properly taken care of, all in due time. But just now I need him. He 's the most dependable worker I have. I can merely suggest a thing to him and know that it will be done, and done right."

"But, David, the *doing* of it takes him downtown, to places where he is brought into contact with the very worst element." Miss Nestor let her darning fall into her lap; she leaned forward, speaking very earnestly. "He does n't spend a single evening with the young people of his own class. He does n't go to their entertainments, or have anything to do with them. Night after night he goes downtown, to those low saloons. And I tell you, David, it 's having anything but a good effect on him. It 's coarsening his mental and moral fiber. He needs different associates, different influences. That 's one reason why I 'm glad Jean is coming. He 'll want to be with her, and he 'll stay at home more."

Ainsworth's face hardened. His tone took on a chill incisiveness, as it always did when any one radically disagreed with him.

"No one will be more pleased to see Jean than I, Mary," he said. "But as far as her influence on Tommy goes, he has always respected my wishes, which is more than I can say for her. He is, as I

have said, doing a very valuable work for me, and I certainly do not purpose to interfere with him just at present. By the way"—he turned his opaque eyes penetratingly on his sister-in-law—"what is this that I hear about Jean and young Leighton?"

"But, David, about Tommy's drinking. He—"

"I am asking you about Jean, Mary."

Miss Nestor sighed and took up her work again. It was useless to try to open David's mind, she thought, once he had closed it. And closed it he had, with his characteristic imperiousness, as far as the subject of Tommy and Tommy's associates was concerned. She did not want to discuss Jean or Dick Leighton; and it was not until Ainsworth had rather sharply repeated his question that she said:

"Why, I 'm sure I don't know what you 've heard, David. Jean's friendship for Mr. Leighton is no secret, and never has been one."

"But from reports, lately, I inferred that there might be something more than a mere casual acquaintance, or a sort of friendship that was the result of their playing together as children. I never really approved of it, but Alice saw no harm. Tommy, too, has dropped several very broad hints. Just what do you know?"

Miss Nestor, her eyes intent on the gaping rent

in the heel of one of Tommy's golf stockings, lifted one shoulder in the suggestion of a shrug.

"I don't *know* anything, except that it is true that Dick has been to see her in New York a number of times, and that 's a long journey to make, simply to call on a friend."

Ainsworth frowned.

"You 're right," he said shortly. "I wish I had considered this before. I don't like it."

"I don't see why," said Miss Nestor. "And, for that matter, Jean might go a good deal further than Dick Leighton and fare much worse! Has he done anything to turn you against him, David?"

With an "Oh, never mind, Mary; never mind," the Congressman brushed aside the question, exactly as all his life he had brushed aside any question as to the fairness of his autocratic pronouncements. His wife had quickly learned that it was useless to argue with him; it was almost unprecedented for his sister-in-law to take a position definitely opposed to him: David Ainsworth was a domestic despot. With his daughter, however, things had been different.

The Congressman had stood firmly upon the platform that a daughter's place was in her father's house until she left it to go to that of her husband; that there was neither necessity nor occasion for

Jean's taking up nursing, settlement work, or anything else; that "career" was a word used by flighty, erratic women as a veil to cover up the misdirection of their energies; that there were plenty of people, differently circumstanced, to work in hospitals and charitable institutions; and, as a final clincher to his whole argument, that Jean was his daughter and owed him absolute and unquestioning obedience. He had flatly refused his consent to her plans.

But in Jean, Ainsworth's own unswerving will had blended with her mother's gentle firmness and fine strength of character. Whatever lure of romance there may have been in the idea of lending her strength to the weak, her courage to the despondent, her young optimism to the hopeless—and unquestionably there was such a lure—back of it all there had been the tug of a sincere and genuine desire to do some real good in the world—her share, if possible, of the great mass of work that cried out to be done.

Even in Randolph people were poor and helpless. They suffered from poverty, from privation and illness. She had never known want in any form. Her father was wealthy, and always she had been surrounded by every comfort. In his home, except from the single standpoint of companionship, she was superfluous. Her aunt administered the various details of the household and managed the

servants. There was, literally, nothing for the girl to do, and she had decided that if all work and no play made Jack a dull boy, then all play and no work would make Jean a useless member of society.

She had thought a good deal about it before she broached the subject to her father, and his unsympathetic attitude, his obvious lack of any desire to understand her point of view, had but braced her determination. Where Tommy was weak, she was strong; where he was readily influenced by specious argument, she was not to be moved. She had announced that she meant to go, either with or without her father's sanction.

Had the question of money been involved he would not have hesitated to use it as a club to beat her into submission; but she had a few thousand dollars of her own, and so was financially independent of him, temporarily, at least. Therefore she had got her own way, but it was, Ainsworth was convinced, a way that would speedily cease to appeal to her. In every letter that arrived he had hoped and fully expected to trace some inkling of failing purpose, to find some hint that she was ready to give over her quixotic notions and return to her home.

Understanding Jean far better than Ainsworth ever had or ever would, Miss Nestor had expected nothing of the sort. She was sure that the girl,

having once put her hand to the plow, would go on to the end of the furrow. Indeed, when the Ainsworth Hospital neared completion, and the Congressman wrote to Jean to ask her to take the superintendency, Miss Nestor had been on tenterhooks lest she decide in favor of going on with her work in New York. And now the little lady was almost pathetically anxious that nothing should occur to strain again the relations between father and daughter; and her solicitude in this, alone gave her the courage to press the question which Ainsworth had dismissed.

"But, David," she said, "you never used to object to Mr. Leighton. What is the matter?"

"I simply don't consider him a proper associate for Jean."

"But—"

He interrupted her brusquely:

"How far has this thing gone?"

"Well, Jean never confided in me," she began cautiously. "I don't think there is any actual engagement—"

"Engagement!" Ainsworth ejaculated. "I should hope not."

"But I *do* think," she finished, half defiantly, "that there 's a pretty thorough understanding."

The sheets of "The Register" crackled under the sudden pressure of Ainsworth's hand; in his voice

there ran an undercurrent of cold anger as he said:

"Well, if there is, it must come to an end, at once! I shall have to talk to Jean about this! She forgets what is due to me. Jean is headstrong and inclined to be rebellious. I've given her too much latitude, and I'm afraid it has n't done her any good. But in this matter I shall expect obedience."

He lifted the paper and leaned back in his chair again. For him, the subject was closed, until it suited him to re-open it. He meant to speak to Jean at the earliest opportunity, and express his wishes, or, if necessary, issue his commands. He did not consider that it would be necessary, however. To him Jean was still a child, subject to paternal authority. The significance of her demonstration of her right to be independent in thought and action had utterly failed to impress him.

VII

ANY unprejudiced observer would have conceded, readily enough, that the town of Randolph needed a new post-office. On the other hand, the dingy old brick building at the Four Corners made a very acceptable lounging-place and forum. Facing on Main Avenue, the low-browed double doorway commanded an unobstructed view of Bridge Street, along which all traffic to and from the railroad station must pass. The square space between the windows and the lock-box section was fairly commodious; individuals of either sex, bursting to express an opinion on such pregnant questions as the price of feed, Len Dillon's unexpected sale of The Full Value Department Store, or the airs Mrs. Chauncey gave herself on the strength of her husband's new automobile, found there an attentive audience. Randolph possessed a carrier system of sorts, but most people preferred to call for their mail: the carrier was usually in a hurry and was apt to be vague as to details, anyway; it seemed much more satisfactory to glean information at first hand.

It was Tommy Ainsworth's custom to stroll down street about four o'clock every pleasant afternoon,

ensconce himself comfortably on a corner of the wide sill of the window next the door, and there await the arrival of the mail from the east and south. If a brief and somewhat hectic six months at college had done nothing else for Tommy, it had taught him that the human male is the lord of creation, born to be admired; and that, having been assigned such a rôle in life, he must fill it creditably.

Acting on this hypothesis, Tommy was wont to deck himself out in the manner approved by the least conservative of university freshmen; and assuredly Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. The lilies of the field would have bowed their heads in humiliation at being so far outshone, could they have gazed upon young Mr. Ainsworth when he had done full justice to what he considered to be a fitting costume for an afternoon's stroll.

He sauntered magnificently into the post-office about half-past three, and bestowed on Clark Jenkins a bow that, for graciousness, was second only to the masterpiece of condescension with which he favored Dick Leighton. Dick, who had stopped in to get a registered letter, nodded good-naturedly; but the postmaster entirely ignored the salute, which he pretended not to have seen.

"That boy of Ainsworth's sure gets my goat," he

confided to Dick as he pushed the return card under the grating. "He comes in here, all dressed up like a picture postcard, and acts as if he was Goddal-mighty. If I 'm not doing anything much, he walks by with his nose in the air; but if I 'm all alone here, and there 's a whole crowd waiting, he 'll stand at the window and ask me forty-seven questions, by actual count. He paraded in yesterday afternoon, just after Norah went home, and I give you my word he 'd have been talking yet if he could have got anybody to listen to him. He makes me tired."

Dick laughed.

"Oh, Tommy 's just a boy," he said, "and he thinks he 's lot more important than any one could possibly be. All of us felt that way at his age, I guess. Where 's Norah to-day? I have n't seen her."

"She had a cold yesterday, and I told her not to come in to-day unless she felt O. K. I can manage all right without her; she 's not absolutely indispensable, you know."

"Poor Norah!" said Dick. Everybody was sorry for Norah Foster. She had never had any real chance. Her mother had died when she was a baby, and her father, who owned a down-at-the-heels farm on the outskirts of the town, never had and never could amount to anything. Norah was pretty, in a

pink-and-white, babyish sort of way, but she was quite as futile as her looks. She "helped out" at the post-office because Clark Jenkins pitied her; but if it were possible to make a mistake she made it, and a wary eye was always kept on her when she was at the stamp window.

"I hear," Jenkins said, dismissing Norah from the conversation, "that the hospital 's about done, and that Jean Ainsworth is coming home to-morrow to take charge. Wonder how the town will look to her after four years of New York."

Dick had been wondering, too. Very small and ugly and cramped, he supposed. But Jean was n't the sort of girl to change much. Jean was—well, she was Jean. And in just twenty-four hours he would be helping her down the steps of the Pullman. His heart quickened its beat a little at the thought. He nodded again to Tommy as he turned toward the door.

"Hwaya Leighton," returned Tommy, languidly, tapping his leg with the light stick he always carried.

"Fine!" said Dick. "Fine! Any news?"

Tommy stared.

"News? News in this mausoleum? Hardly!" He withdrew his gaze from Dick and directed it out of the window.

"It will be nice to have Jean home again," Dick observed. "I hope she has a pleasant day for her journey, to-morrow."

Tommy's eyes, no longer supercilious, but frankly hostile, came back to his.

"You seem to be remarkably familiar with the plans of—my sister." The stressed pause between the preposition and the pronoun was intended to convey a crushing rebuke. The deliberate turning of the ultra-tailored shoulders, even more eloquent, should have put Dick in his place at once; but Dick was unaware that he had stepped out of it. He understood both Tommy's dislike of him and its causes, and he harbored not the slightest animosity toward the boy. He fumbled in his pocket for his tobacco pouch and brown papers, and stood for a moment in the doorway while he rolled a cigarette.

Main Avenue lay like a rusty red ribbon under the hot, dry shimmer of the afternoon sun. There had been no rain for several days, and a film of dust covered its brick pavements and rose in slow sulky clouds about the feet of passers-by, of whom there were not many. The day's marketing had been finished hours before, and the young people had not yet begun the regular afternoon pilgrimage to the Greek's, where daily a surprising quantity of appetite-spoiling indigestibles was consumed.

Ike Milliken slouched in the doorway of the express office; on the steps of the telephone exchange a short-sleeved, hatless young lady sat fanning herself with a folded newspaper. The windows of "The Register" office next door glittered like a row of huge yellow sardine tins. In front of the drug store a lean, shaggy horse drooped between the shafts of a ramshackle surrey, flicking a listless wisp of tail now and again at the flies that buzzed over its flanks. From the open basement door of Milt Cummings's "High Class Billiard and Pool Parlor," the clicking impact of the balls sounded plainly on the still, drowsy air.

Dick scratched a match on the rough door-casing, shielded the tiny flame with the palm of his hand, and applied it to the end of his cigarette. But he did not draw in that first satisfying inhalation of smoke. Instead, he straightened up slowly, and stepped out upon the pavement, the burnt match still clipped between his fingers, his eyes fixed with a curious intentness on a cloud of dust far up the avenue.

"Now what the devil—?" he muttered, half aloud; and Tommy, in the embrasure of the window, abandoned his attitude of haughty reserve and craned his neck to see.

In wavering spurts of saffron the cloud rolled nearer; and from its depths came a low throbbing

hum, like the angry droning of a swarm of bees. In the swirling dust veils, dark figures bobbed up and down. The humming sound grew louder and louder. A boy on a bicycle pedaled rapidly along, shouting, waving frantically. Ike Milliken ran down to the curb and stood staring.

"What is it?" demanded Tommy, at Dick's elbow. "What's all the crowd?"

Past the Methodist Church, past Dr. Evans's white-fenced garden, past Elm Street corner, swept the gathering whirlwind of dust and humanity. People were running in the street, on the sidewalks, along the strip of grass that bordered the fences. There were yells, shouts, shrill cries, all blended in a confused crescendo. And over and above the tumult, beating insistently from mouth to mouth, throbbed the sinister word "murder!"

A shrieking woman rushed at Dick Leighton and seized his arm. He shook himself free and shouldered his way through the crowd that centered about the figure of a man, who at the sound of Dick's voice flung up both arms and lurched unsteadily forward. His thin gray hair was matted into a mass of clotted red at the base of his skull, and the collar of his flannel shirt was stiff with the blood that had dripped and dried on it. There was blood on his face, smeared across the tear-

blotched cheeks and raddled into the straggling beard. He clung, swaying, to Dick's arm. His words, disjointed, incoherent, came between sobbing breaths. The excited crowd pressed about him, questioning, exclaiming, advising. A dozen men tried to speak to Dick at once. He silenced them with a curt: "Keep still! Let me talk to him."

The little man was nearly exhausted. His voice kept breaking on a high, hysterical note; in his eyes stalked the stark terror of what he had witnessed before the blow on his head had brought a brief oblivion. Little threads of saliva trickled from the corners of his loose-lipped mouth; his whole face worked spasmodically as he babbled forth the story he had run four miles to tell—a story that sent a sick shudder over Dick Leighton as, bit by bit, he pieced it out.

"Take him over to the drug store," he directed Clark Jenkins, briefly; and, brushing the crowd aside, he started across the street. He did not seem to be hurrying, but Tommy Ainsworth, close at his heels, found himself running to keep up.

Outside the telephone exchange the folded newspaper lay where the operator had dropped it. Dick stepped inside the building.

"Call Jackson's," he ordered. He picked up the receiver of an instrument that stood on a small desk

beside the door. "Then get the Corbin farm, Masterson's place, the Garvey mill, Henderson's, Cal White's house, and the Berry place."

"Oh, is n't it awful, Dick!" The girl's hands were trembling; big tears were rolling down her cheeks. "I can't hardly believe it 's Norah that 's —There 's Jackson's; go ahead."

"Cory?—This is Leighton talking. Is Bud McFee there?—Cass Blake has murdered Norah Foster. Tell McFee to hop into an automobile and watch the upper bridge. Send Murray over to me at my office at once; we 'll need a dozen horses. He 'll understand. Have Capron come with him. That 's all."

"Here 's Corbin," announced the operator, and the plugs on the switchboard clicked into the new connection.

"Leighton talking. Have you seen anything of Cass Blake?"

"Cass Blake? Not fer quite a spell," came the farmer's slow drawl. "You want him?"

"We want him for the murder of Norah Foster. Have Jimmy and Tec take their guns and see to it that he does n't get by your place. If you find any trace of him, report at once. Notify Phillips to keep a sharp lookout. Good-by."

"Jack Masterson on the wire, Dick."

One after another, the calls went out. Railroad

officials were notified; every trainman was warned to be on the alert, that no skulking figure might glide from a sheltering patch of woods, or slip aboard a slow-moving freight as it crawled sluggishly through the valley. Stalwart, grim-visaged men shouldered their guns and hurried off to patrol every road and bridge and trail within a twenty-mile radius of the place Norah Foster had called home.

Strand by strand, that crisp, clear voice at the telephone wove the meshes of an invisible net, meshes that reached from house to house, from farm to farm—meshes that spread and tightened and grew stronger as afternoon faded into a starlit night.

VIII

CASS BLAKE had long been known as a worthless character, with instincts undoubtedly vicious. When he was not being housed and fed at the expense of the taxpayers, he had worked intermittently as a farm-hand, or done odd jobs for whomsoever would employ him. His infatuation for Norah Foster had never been taken seriously by any one, least of all by the girl herself. When he had stood for an hour or so outside the post-office, waiting for her to appear, she had passed him without even a nod; his clumsy attentions she had repulsed one after another, and in no uncertain terms. If she spoke or thought of him at all, it was as "that drunken slouch, Cass Blake," precisely as most of Randolph had characterized him. No one had liked him; by all he was regarded with suspicious aversion. The brutal bestiality of his crime at the Foster farm fanned into sudden flame the hatred that had long been smoldering against him.

Just as a loaded shell, exploding in the midst of a fire, scatters embers to the four winds, so the news of the tragedy scattered over the whole

country-side parties of men intent on the capture of the criminal. They went about the work quietly, almost stolidly, yet with a certain grim determination that was more ominous than any display of excitement. Bill Murray, the giant teamster from the mills, whom Dick had sworn in as sheriff's deputy, epitomized their set finality of purpose in the three words he spoke to Norah Foster's father: "We 'll get him."

Randolph slept little that night. It watched the sporadic gleams of the lanterns that flickered among the distant trees; it listened intently to catch the occasional shouts, now faint and far off, now sounding nearer, as the man-hunt circled the town. The breath of the vagrant wind was tainted with the pungent smell of flaring torches, vibrant with the deep-throated baying of dogs at fault over a broken, illusive trail. Somewhere in the valley, or among its girding hills, a wild beast lurked. He must be found and driven from his hiding-place. They meant to "get him."

And he knew it. The first bell-clear note that echoed through the ravine caught him, quivering, up from the ground where he had thrown himself to get his breath. He could not tell from which direction the sound had come. There was no moon; the pale starlight did not penetrate the thick leaves and undergrowth. The woods were black, formless.

The dog bayed again, nearer this time; another and another took up the chorus.

He ran. . . .

To get away, somewhere, anywhere! To hide! They must n't catch him. He must n't let them catch him. If they did—

Fear was everywhere. The darkness was peopled by his enemies. The heavier shadows under the trees were alive. The little night voices of the woods beat in his ears and mingled with the voices of the hounds, confusedly. He stumbled through a birch thicket and out upon a well-defined trail. There was water down there somewhere. The dogs could n't follow through water. But this trail—somebody might be watching—

A partridge rose with a sudden thunderous whir of wings. He screamed—turned—plunged back through the thicket.

To get away . . . to get away! Somewhere. Anywhere. He must n't be caught—God!—he must n't be caught.

Blind, mad with terror, he stumbled on in the darkness. Over ledges, where jagged spurs of rock bruised and cut him. Through brambles, where thorns caught and tore at his flesh. Invisible trees rose up in front of him, striking him violently. Trailing vines twined themselves around his ankles and tripped him. A hundred times he fell. A hun-

dred times he struggled to his feet, and ran on, dodging, doubling, turning now this way, now that. His coat was gone. The tatters of his shirt were stripped from his shoulders. Bruised, bleeding, his breath coming in short gasps that racked his aching lungs, he ran and fell. And ran and fell again.

He had lost all sense of direction, all sense of time. He must get away. He must n't get caught. He knew nothing, was conscious of nothing but fear and hate—fear that held him in its panic grip and lashed him with every twig that crackled underfoot, every slightest sound that broke the silence; hate, blind, aimless, all-embracing, for everything that lived and moved and was free to follow after him. All that had ever been human in Cass Blake was swallowed up, obliterated, in those two emotions.

When, just in the gray of the early daylight, he staggered over the crest of a pine ridge, and half crawled, half dragged himself to cover, the two had merged into one. Hate. The same savage instinct that turns a panther at bay when the pack cries at its heels. Crouching, with bared fang and claw, it waits its chance to spring and strike. And so Cass Blake crouched, while the meshes of the net drew ever closer and closer around him. He had killed once; he would kill again. He lay there in the dark, his thick fingers twitching on the butt of his gun.

Waiting. Watching. Listening to the hunt sweeping down into the valley.

The rising sun caught up the streamers of mist that veiled the dawn as Dick Leighton's posse splashed through the bed of a shallow brook and turned down-stream. Twenty years before, the brook, pressed back into a deep pond, had foamed and dashed over the rim of a primitive dam, from which ran the flume that carried power to the iron turbine of one of the most prosperous sawmills in the county. Now the water trickled lazily through a hundred openings in the shattered dam and meandered on its peaceful way down through the valley; the flume, its rotted boards rent and gaping, was almost hidden under a rank growth of vines and weeds.

The mill itself was rapidly falling into disintegration. The boards were warped and weather-bitten; the foundations had settled, throwing all the supporting beams out of plumb. The whole structure looked on the point of collapse. Up to the very door, sagging on its rusty hinges, tall grass grew. A mottled lizard, sunning himself on a rotting log, scuttled away to cover at the approach of the posse.

"Think they 're barkin' up the right tree, Dick?" Murray asked, reining in beside the sheriff, as the dogs dashed around the side of the building and

bayed and clamored furiously about the flume. "Kind o' too plain, ain't it?"

Dick shook his head.

"That does n't signify. The wonder is that he has n't taken to cover before this. He has n't any plan; his trail showed that. No man in his senses would have left such tracks. He 's just an animal, crazy with terror. He 's around here somewhere, Bill." His eyes traveled frowningly over the sagging mill structure, then across the shallow brook to the meadows, lying green and peaceful in the early sun. He tapped the ground with his heel. "He 's here somewhere, Bill," he repeated. "Look at those dogs. And—look there!"

Directly in front of them ran the line of the old flume. A little above and to the right, a narrow streak of white in one of the mold-darkened boards showed where a sliver had been broken out. The sliver itself had fallen to one side and, caught across the broad leaf of a shoot of milkweed, balanced up and down as the top swayed in the wind, like the slim needle of a compass pointing the way.

"Um," observed Murray; "there 's that. How you goin' to get him out?"

Dick's reply was to draw his revolver and fling one leg over the side of the flume.

Murray caught his arm.

"Don't be a damn' fool!" he exclaimed roughly.

"No?" Dick turned his head and regarded his deputy gravely. "Do you think he 'll come out if I whistle?"

" 'T won't do no harm to try."

Dick shrugged. "All right," he said. He raised his voice to a shout. "Blake! Cass Blake! We know you 're there. You may as well come out."

Silence. Only the musical gurgle of water slipping through the ruined dam, the silken whisper of wind among the leaves, and the droning of insects. Dick turned an ironic smile over his shoulder at Murray.

"Let go, Bill," he said. He shook his arm free, and the deputy with a shrug stepped back.

"Um-m," he said. "Well, it 's your funeral." He made no further attempt to interfere. Had he been in Dick's place, he would not have assigned to some one else a dangerous piece of work: he would have done it himself. The sheriff was merely doing his duty, and the deputy accepted the fact; but his face was set in grim lines and his fingers gripped the butt of his revolver, holding it ready for instant use.

The bottom boards of the flume had long since rotted to a soft, spongy mass, from which emanated a disagreeable odor. Here and there the side walls had given way altogether, or slanted obliquely toward each other until they almost met. Before he had gone a dozen feet Dick was obliged to drop to his

hands and knees in order to get ahead at all. Over his head a heavy growth of briers wove themselves into an impenetrable tangle, so densely matted with wild morning-glory vines as almost to shut out the light of day. A dirty white fungus, mottled with leprous yellow spots, gave out a rankly pungent smell.

At every movement Dick could feel the soggy boards crumble beneath him. Once some slimy object slithered away from under his fingers; he could not see what it was. The place was filled with a wan, ghostly twilight. It was like a tomb, damp, moldering, repellent with its decay of death. Its airless silence was broken only by a slow *drip—drip—drip* of moisture from sodden leaves to sodden ground.

Dick felt his breath coming hard, not with fear but from sheer physical disgust. Foot by foot, he groped his way forward, eyes straining to pierce the gloom ahead, every sense alert to catch the slightest significant sound. Just in front of him the flume dipped at a sharp angle into the penstock; the shadowy gulf of the wheel-pit yawned dismally, its blackness grayed by the vague outlines of some of the broken uprights and the débris of the old wheel.

Beyond, it seemed that a darker shadow moved swiftly, soundlessly. And vanished.

"Blake!" Dick's voice smote sharply against his

own ears. "We know you 're there! Come out!" He leaned outward and downward, searching the gloom. He could hear nothing, see nothing. There was neither sound nor movement. "Blake!" he repeated. "Cass Blake!"

A bright yellow flame flashed; a streak of fire darted up over the opening of the penstock; a bullet sang venomously past his ear. He flung himself flat on his face, and almost simultaneously the sound of his own automatic woke the crashing echoes. There was a scream, quivering, shrill, like that of a wounded animal; a rattling fall. And then a silence that seemed to throb into low, strangled moans.

A trail of bluish smoke drifted out under the tangle of vines and briers, and dissolved in the quiet air. The group of men waiting beside the flume watched it with narrowed eyes, fingering their revolvers nervously.

"There was two shots before Dick let go with his automatic," Jack Capron said. "Don't you reckon I 'd best go on down there, Bill?"

Murray held up his hand.

"Somebody 's comin'," he said curtly.

The matted vines swayed, heaved, parted. From the clutching green tangle the stooping figure of a man emerged, dragging after him a crumpled dreadful Thing, a Thing that might once have been human, but that was now a mere formless mass of torn

clothes and shattered flesh, drenched with blood, smeared with mud and filth.

"Is he dead?" Capron demanded.

"No; he 's still alive."

A sudden guttural murmur swelled through the group; there was a movement forward. The sheriff's fingers relaxed their grip, and his burden slumped to the ground.

"That 'll do, boys!" he said sharply. His gray eyes, steel-bright in the grimy mask of his face, flickered from one to another of the men. "Put up those guns and lend a hand here!"

IX

WHEN, with a screeching of brake-shoes and grinding of ponderous wheels, Number Seventeen came to a standstill at the Randolph station, only a single passenger alighted from the long string of coaches, and stood glancing, in some surprise and uncertainty, up and down the deserted platform. Number Seventeen was the only through train that stopped at Randolph, and its arrival was something of an event in the daily lives of the town loafers. Usually there were a dozen of them yawning on the benches and cluttering up the doorways, gaping at the occupants of the Pullmans as if the travelers were rare and interesting curiosities. The ticket agent could not remember when there had not been at least one or two pairs of willing hands to help him with the baggage. He trotted perspiringly down the gravel sweep beside the tracks, wheeling the truck and called back over his shoulder to Amos Milliken, the driver of the stage, to "hurry up, will you, Amos, and gimme a lift on these here things."

It was not until the two big trunks had been loaded upon the truck and wheeled back to the bag-

gage-room that either of the men recognized the solitary passenger. Then the old stage-driver whipped off his battered straw hat and hurried forward.

"By jux! I did n't know ye, Miss Jean!" he exclaimed. "Never dreamed it was you! Did n't see nobody to meet ye, and thought ye must 'a missed the train, sure. I cal'late your folks must 'a' forgot all about ye."

"It looks that way, does n't it, Amos?" Jean Ainsworth shook hands cordially with the old man and with the station-master, who had followed close behind him. "It 's strange there 's no one here," she said. "I 'm certain they expected me. I telegraphed, yesterday. But maybe the message went astray."

Amos shook his head.

"No; they got it all right. Ike told me it come, and he took it up to the house hisself. They 've forgot, that 's all."

"I 'll phone 'em right away, shall I?" volunteered the station-master. " 'Twon't take Tommy more'n a jiffy to run over with the car."

Amos Milliken straightened up.

"I 'd like ter know what 's the matter with my takin' her up in the bus?" said he. " 'T won't be the first time she 's rid in it. I kin drive slow, so 's she won't be nervous."

Jean smiled at him in friendly fashion.

"That will be nice, Amos," she said. "I 'm sure you 'll take good care of me. Shall we start right away? I see you 've no other passengers." She stood talking to the station-master, while Amos hobbled off to bring up the ancient relic that for twenty years had done duty as a stage. She was a tall girl, with a trim, slender figure that was set off to advantage by the severe lines of her tailored suit. From under the brim of her close-fitting hat, tendrils of bright hair escaped, to curl alluringly over her small ears, and ripple into rebellious waves across her forehead. She carried herself well; there was an alert grace about every move and gesture.

"I 'll send them trunks up the first thing in the morning, sure," the agent promised, hoisting Jean's suitcase up beside the driver's seat on the stage. "Mebbe to-night, if I can get some o' them lazy slouches on the job. They 're all so het up over Norah Foster that it ain't likely they 'll show up, though."

Milliken climbed rheumatically down from his perch on the narrow front seat, and he and the station-master gallantly assisted Jean into the vehicle, one on each side of her. Then the aged driver climbed back, flourished his whip, shouted wheezily at the horses, and the start was made.

The macadam of Bridge Street was being re-

paired, and Milliken, in deference to the comfort of his passenger, took the longer route across the upper bridge. On the way he regaled Jean with a garrulously circumstantial account of the Foster murder, interrupting himself at frequent intervals to yell at his team, which paid not the slightest attention to him, but pursued their placid way at their customary jog-trot. Ten minutes brought them to Hill Street. They slowed down to a walk, and plodded up the steep incline to Summit Street.

The old Randolph place on the corner was just as Jean remembered it. Nothing had been changed. Even the grass on the front lawn was a little overlong. The Judge had liked and kept it that way. Almost the girl expected to see him, bareheaded, shirt-sleeved, pottering about in the old-fashioned garden where he had successfully grown everything from turnips to Jacqueminot roses. Some of the roses were in bloom now, great splashes of crimson, gorgeous among the rich green of the leaves. Most of the windows were open, but Dick was nowhere to be seen, although Jean peered eagerly about in the hope of a glimpse of him. Indeed, the street, like all the other streets through which the stage had passed, seemed to be deserted. A beagle hound, asleep in a sunny corner by some stone steps, was the only living creature within view.

The first sight of the big white house on the cor-

ner of Mountain Avenue sent a queer, tingling thrill over Jean. Home!

Amos drew up close to the curb. She paid him, thanked him, and, declining his offer of assistance, picked up her bag and walked slowly up the well-swept walk, drinking in, with eyes that were a little misty, every detail of the familiar scene that she had so often reconstructed in memory. The garage was new; it had not been built when she went away. But there was the squatty little tool house, where Ezra kept his precious garden implements under rigorous lock and key; there was the old well, picturesque as ever in its green moss velvet; there was the inevitable bed of geraniums, a seven-pointed salmon star; there was the summer-house, its roof just visible beyond the sweep of the grape arbor. Home. And after four years' absence there seemed to be no one to bid her welcome back to it. There had been some mistake, of course, some misunderstanding. Nevertheless, Jean was unable, for the moment, to banish the feeling of almost childish hurt and disappointment that had come to her when, on leaving the train, she had seen that long, empty stretch of platform.

The front door stood wide. The screen was not hooked. Jean opened it and stepped quietly into the cool half-light of the hall. From the library came a subdued rustling sound, as of the pages of a

newspaper being turned over. An undulating spiral of cigar smoke drifted through the doorway. Jean tiptoed forward and drew aside the portières.

"Well," she said, "does n't anybody want to see me? Shall I go away again?"

"Jean!" Miss Nestor's sewing-basket fell to the floor; spools and buttons rolled in all directions unheeded. Ainsworth dropped his paper and hurried to the door. There was a flurry of excited greetings, exclamations, kisses. Finally, Jean disengaged herself gently from her aunt's embrace, and slipped one arm about the little lady's shoulders, the while retaining her warm clasp of her father's hand.

Looking up at her adoringly through wet lashes, Miss Nestor thought how closely she resembled her mother. There was the same proud poise of the head, the same gracious line of the mouth and chin, at once firm and tender. But there was this very decided difference: Alice Ainsworth's eyes had been quiet, heavy-lidded, patient; her daughter's were quick, restless, sparkling with laughter one instant, introspectively grave the next. They were what Alice Ainsworth herself had called "seeking eyes." Just now, they were brimming with gladness, yet a shadow of wistfulness troubled their depths. She said:

"I don't believe you 're a bit glad to see me, any of you! I got off the train expecting to be

welcomed with open arms, and there was n't a soul in sight except Amos Milliken. I was so glad to see a familiar face that I almost hugged him. I did, I assure you, Father. Where 's Tommy?"

"Why, he went down to meet you," said Ainsworth. "I should have gone myself, but he made a point of driving you back in the new roadster. I don't understand his not being there; he 's been gone some time."

"Probably he counted on the train being late," Jean suggested. "But for the first time in the history of the road it arrived on the minute."

Her father smiled.

"Well, I tell you, Jean, things are improving here! Even the railroad realizes our growing importance and shows us consideration. The trains are not nearly as late as they used to be. I 'm glad yours was on time to-day; it 's an irksome trip at best."

"Come and sit down, dear," Miss Nestor urged anxiously. "You must be very tired. Here, take this chair, and I'll get you a cup of tea."

But Jean protested that she was not in the least tired, and she had had tea on the train. She was in high spirits; she talked rapidly, animatedly, bubbling over with happy excitement. Her admiring comments on the hospital—she had caught a glimpse of it from the train window—

brought a glow of gratification to Ainsworth's face.

"I 'm very glad you 're pleased with the location, Jean," he said. "And I think you will approve of the interior arrangements, too. Naturally, the building is pretty bare now; there 's very little in it, because I knew you would prefer to supervise the equipment in person."

Jean nodded.

"It will be perfectly wonderful, Father. I 've a headful of ideas that I 'm dying to try out; but I shall want lots of advice and help."

"Doctor Evans is holding himself in readiness to consult with you," Ainsworth said. "A very worthy man, Evans. Of course, he has his limitations, but within them he 's quite competent. I 've told him you would let him know when you felt sufficiently rested to begin the work."

"I feel sufficiently rested right now!" declared Jean gaily. "And I 'll be awfully glad to work with Doctor Evans. I like him immensely. I thought I saw him just as I was leaving the station, driving like a lunatic across the bridge, but the car was so far off I could n't be sure. I thought perhaps there might have been an accident downtown. The bus came around through the upper road, but it looked to me as though there were a big crowd in the Square, and there was a lot of noise."

"Probably something to do with the Foster mur-

der, I should say. A particularly brutal crime was committed yesterday, and the criminal is still at large."

Jean's bright face clouded.

"I know," she said. "Amos was talking about it on the way over. Poor Norah! She never harmed any one or anything in all her life. And Matt Foster—what on earth will he do, Father? He 's always been such a useless, futile sort of man; he depended on Norah for everything."

Miss Nester shuddered.

"It 's dreadful! That such a thing could happen in a civilized community! Every time I think of that wretch, my blood boils. The whole town is up in arms, and Mr. Leighton has had posses searching for him since yesterday afternoon. Tommy was with one of them."

"Oh!" Jean exclaimed. "Of course! That 's why Dick was n't at the station to meet me! He wrote me he 'd surely be there."

"Mr. Leighton wrote you he 'd meet you at the station?" Ainsworth ignored Miss Nestor's warning glance. "Mr. Leighton?"

"Yes. He—"

The front door was suddenly flung open, and Tommy, hatless and out of breath, rushed into the room.

"They 've caught Blake!" he shouted. And

then, catching sight of his sister, he gave a loud, joyous whoop. "Jean! oh, Jean!" There was no doubt of the sincerity of his welcome.

Laughing, disheveled, she emerged from his bear-like hug and held him at arm's length.

"You bad boy! What do you mean by not meeting me? I had to come up all alone, like a poor relation."

Tommy grinned sheepishly.

"Well, I started, all right," he defended himself. "Honest, I did. I had all kinds of time. I was going to make a big splash with the new roadster and drive you up in style. But when I went through the Square, Leighton's posse was just bringing in Blake, and—I stopped for a minute. But only for a minute, Sis. Just as soon as I could get clear of the crowd, I beat it for the station, but the blamed train was on time, and you 'd gone. I 'm no end sorry."

"Never mind; it does n't matter a bit, not a single bit. Oh, I 'm *so* glad to see you!" She hugged him again, ecstatically. "And you 've really grown up! Tommy—why, Tommy, you 're getting to be a great big *man!*" She whirled him around in a gay little dance, almost colliding with the maid, Kitty, who had come to the door, and, after several abortive attempts, had finally succeeded in attracting the attention of the Congressman.

"Mr. McAllister? Why, yes; of course. Tell him to come in, Kitty."

"Ah! The great and only McAllister!" scoffed Jean, softly. "Is he as big a fraud as ever, Aunt Mary?"

"Worse, my dear!"

"And then some!" nodded Tommy. "When he talks to a woman, you 'd think she had Helen of Troy backed clean off the boards."

McAllister was a tall, heavily built man, gray of hair, ruddy of complexion. He had a ready smile, and his manners were elaborate. It was generally admitted that he "had a way with the ladies." His stock of compliments, carefully sorted and classified to suit the generation and individual, had a strong mid-Victorian flavor; but they were none the less highly prized and coquettishly angled for by more than one hopeful spinster, who thought it a sin and a shame that such a fine figure of a man should be alone in the world, and who cast secretly covetous glances at the neat brick house a few blocks from "The Register" office.

But to Samuel McAllister the shrines of love were many. He worshiped at them all, floridly, openly, yet with a wary discretion. Entirely satisfied with his unregenerate bachelorhood, he had no mind to exchange it for the doubtful blessings of matrimony. Had he possessed a wife, he would undoubtedly

have beaten her: he was a firm believer in the doctrine of the woman, the dog, and the walnut-tree.

As far as he was concerned, there was no God but David Ainsworth, and Samuel McAllister was his prophet—which is to say that he recognized Ainsworth's vast superiority of brain, and bowed to it as he bowed to nothing else on the earth beneath, in the heavens above, or in the waters under the earth. He did what Ainsworth told him to do. Occasionally, he offered an opinion or a suggestion; seldom did he venture to criticize. He knew his own power and prestige and that of his paper, but he was shrewd enough to realize that he shone by reflected light, rather than by any glory of his own. The actual words that appeared in "The Register" editorials were Samuel McAllister's; the spirit that animated them was David Ainsworth's.

When he entered the library, McAllister's start of pleasure at seeing Jean was not entirely feigned: he had always considered her well worth looking at.

"Well, well! My dear Miss Ainsworth!"

"How do you do, Mr. McAllister?"

"Much better for seeing you!" He hurried forward to take the hand she extended and bowed over it effusively. "How splendid you are looking, is she not?"—turning to the others for confirmation. "Upon my word, what is the matter with the men

in New York that they let you get away? Are they all blind?"

Jean smiled.

"No wonder you 're a successful politician—they tell me you are, Mr. McAllister—if you have such pretty speeches on tap all the time!"

"If my success depended on that, Miss Ainsworth,"—he stood a little away from her and lifted one hand to his heart—"if it depended on that alone, and I could have you for my inspiration, I should be President!"

"Oh, you 're incorrigible!"

He turned to Miss Nestor. It was not his way to neglect any one.

"Ah, my dear Miss Nestor!" he said blandly. "How well you are looking to-day. I saw you in the garden this morning as I was passing the house, and I said to myself that no wonder the flowers flourished. Roses would grow in a desert for your smile!"

Miss Nestor blushed.

"Here, here!" she exclaimed, trying to cover her confusion. "You 're not talking to Jean, Mr. McAllister."

"I might almost fancy that I were," he said. "You are as much alike as two of your own blossoms. One is the bud, the other the rose in full bloom."

"Oh, gee!" Tommy threw back his head and whistled at the ceiling. "This is sure some flowery conversation, what?"

"If that was meant for a joke, Tommy," Jean said severely, "you ought to have provided it with a label."

"It 's not a joke; it 's an outrage," Ainsworth declared, and joined in the laughter that followed his own little pleasantry. He was in his most cordial humor. Jean had come home. True, the manner of her coming was far from his preconceived idea: he had considered at some length the way in which he would receive her, when, the glamour of her romantic enthusiasm dulled by contact with sordid realities, conscience-stricken at having acted in defiance to his expressed wishes, she should return, humbled and chastened, to his roof; and he had been chagrined that at no time during her protracted absence had she displayed the slightest indication that she was either penitent or self-reproachful. On the contrary, she had appeared to consider her position and behavior entirely reasonable; she had neither sought for pardon nor admitted, even tacitly, that she had erred.

The suggestion that she return to Randolph as superintendent of the new hospital had not been made by her; she had even hesitated about accepting the appointment. Still, she had accepted it; and

her father had convinced himself that her consent constituted a victory for him.

As she had capitulated, then, he was disposed to be affable. He deferred to Miss Nestor, and paid Jean a very neatly turned compliment, to the surprised perturbation of McAllister, who, confronted by an unexpected rival in his own particular field, was spurred to fresh flights of metaphor.

Jean was amused and touched by her father's unwonted unbending. She did not entirely follow his psychological processes, but she surmised, and rightly, that his pleasure in her home-coming was sincere. Was it possible, she asked herself, that she had underestimated his affection for her? Had much of his seeming hardness come from a lack of understanding, not so much on his part as on her own? Here was food for thought, indeed!

She looked at him with new eyes, instinctively preparing to adjust herself to this new angle, mentally picturing the different and delightful relationship that would be theirs in the future, a relationship devoid of antagonism and based on mutual respect and toleration.

X

MUSING thus, but half hearing the ornate peroration in which McAllister was indulging, Jean's attention was caught by Kitty's voice at the door, announcing: "Mr. Leighton is here to see you, Mr. Ainsworth."

Instantly the Congressman's manner changed. His smile vanished, and his affability with it.

"Tell Mr. Leighton I can't see him, Kitty; I'm engaged," he said.

"But, Father, it's *Dick!*" Jean exclaimed. She half rose from her chair. Taken by surprise, her hasty inference was that her father had failed to grasp the identity of his caller. "It's Dick Leighton, Father!" she repeated, and Kitty added respectfully: "He said he wanted to speak to you most particular, Mr. Ainsworth, but I was to tell you it would n't take only a minute."

Ainsworth hesitated, frowning. He glanced at McAllister, but that gentleman was intent on the view from the side window. The Congressman made a gesture of impatience.

"Very well, Kitty. Show him in."

Tommy, his hands in his pockets, strolled over to the side of McAllister.

"I 'll say he 's got his nerve with him!" he remarked in an undertone. "What do you suppose he wants Father for?" He half turned about, a look of insolent curiosity on his face, as Dick Leighton, the mud scarcely dried on his riding-boots and breeches, and followed by his deputy, Murray, appeared in the doorway. He had hardly crossed the threshold when Jean went swiftly forward to meet him, both hands outstretched. At the sight of her, the tense gravity of his face was illumined by a smile of eager gladness.

"Jean!" In the name on his lips, there was reverence and homage and adoration, and a sort of keen yearning that swept them into a swimming little world peopled with their two selves, bounded and horizoned by that which welled up in their hearts. So, for a moment, they stood there, with hands and eyes that clung; oblivious to angry and anxious glances alike, unconscious of the smoldering antagonism that needed but a breath to send it crackling into open hostility. Neither spoke. They had no need for words. But the message that their eyes conveyed, each to the other, was plain for all in the room to read.

Dick was the first to recover himself, to realize

that they were not alone. He released Jean's hands and stepped back a pace, with a courteous bow that included every one present. Miss Nestor's pleasant if rather embarrassed greeting was in marked contrast to the Congressman's icily formal "Mr. Leighton," and Tommy did not acknowledge the salutation at all. He leaned against the window-casing and clicked his heel on the wainscot, pursing his lips in an insolent whistle. Dick felt the sharp hostility now, and stiffened himself to meet it. Jean felt it and bewilderedly sought for its meaning.

It was McAllister who broke the tension.

"Well, I hear you got him, Leighton," he said briskly. "I was coming along just as you brought him in, but I did n't stop for details. Where did you find him?"

"Out at the old sawmill, beyond Watkins's farm," Dick answered.

"You don't say! He gave you a real chase, did n't he? Did he make you any trouble?"

"A little. But after we discovered just where he was hidden, it was a simple enough matter to drive him out."

Murray rumbled out a great guffaw.

"Simple?" he ejaculated. "My aunt!"

"Was he armed?" Jean queried. Except for one

quick, puzzled glance about, her eyes had not left Dick's face since he entered the room.

"You bet he was."

Miss Nestor leaned forward, her nervousness eclipsed by her curiosity.

"And did he shoot, Mr. Leighton?" she asked, with breathless interest.

"Yes. He got in two shots, but he didn't hit anybody; and then he got hit, himself, and everything was all right."

"Um! *Then* it was," Murray grunted. "That cuss had crawled down the old flume an' hid in the wheel-pit. Dick had to crawl down after him, right into his gun." He swung 'round and pointed a long forefinger. "If you hadn't 'a' got him when you did, son, there—"

"Noble Six Hundred!" murmured Tommy, with disagreeable irony.

"That 'll do, Bill," Dick interposed, as Murray would have continued. "Nobody wants to hear about it."

"But we do, Dick!" Jean insisted. "What happened then?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing!" he told her almost curtly. "We both fired, and I was lucky, that's all. Blake wasn't."

"Um. No; he were n't," agreed Murray. "Looks like a sieve."

"Is he badly hurt?" Jean asked, and Dick nodded.

"Yes, he is. And"—turning to the Congressman—"that is what I came to see you about, Mr. Ainsworth."

"In what way, may I ask, does it concern me?" Ainsworth's tone was studiedly impersonal. He had remained standing; nor had he indicated that his callers should sit.

"Why, simply that when we were bringing Blake into town, he was seized with a hemorrhage, and we were obliged to take him to the hospital."

A spark glowed behind the opacity of Ainsworth's eyes. He said angrily:

"What? To the hospital? It is n't open."

"Doctor Evans had a key, and one of the rooms was in sufficiently good shape to serve the purpose."

"What was the matter with the jail?"

"There was no time to take him there. We had to rush him into the first place we could find. I should have consulted you, but we were obliged to act quickly."

"You had your nerve with you," struck in Tommy.

Dick wheeled on him.

"I am explaining to your father that it was necessary," he said sharply.

The Congressman darted a silencing look at his son, before he said:

"It may have seemed so, Mr. Leighton, but could you not have made temporary arrangements for him elsewhere?"

"I could not, sir! He had to have proper medical aid and attention at once, or he would have died from loss of blood. The hospital was the logical, indeed, the only place for him."

Jean had been listening in puzzled dismay. Her father's chill formality and Tommy's open malevolence were no less incomprehensible to her than was this cryptic attitude in regard to the hospital. What was such an institution for, if not to receive the sick and suffering? To be sure, Cass Blake was a criminal, but common humanity demanded that every effort be made to save his life. And her father both spoke and acted as if Dick had done something reprehensible! Of course, he really implied nothing of the sort, but almost any one might believe that he did. So anxious was she that Dick Leighton should draw no such mistaken inference that she stepped forward, saying with impulsive cordiality:

"Why, of course, Dick! Father does n't mean that what you did was n't perfectly all right."

"I dare say you meant well, Mr. Leighton," the Congressman went on, "but I think you acted hastily."

"Prompt action was necessary if the man's life

were to be saved," retorted Dick. "I acted according to my best judgment." His head went up a little, as he added firmly: "I regret that you feel as you do, Mr. Ainsworth, but I was entirely within the rights of my office. I merely stopped out of courtesy, to acquaint you with what I had done." For a moment his level eyes held the Congressman's, coldly antagonistic. Then, with a slight inclination of his head, he turned to Jean. "I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you soon, Jean," he said.

"Of course, Dick! This evening?"

He shook his head.

"I 'm sorry, but I 'll have to be at the hospital. Murray is going up to relieve the guard now, and I shall relieve him as soon as I 've had my supper. I 'll have to be there all night. May I telephone you to-morrow?"

"Do!" She gave him her hand and he pressed it warmly. Then, with a bow that included all in the room, he turned to the door.

"Observe his modest bearing!" Tommy sneered. He made no effort to lower his voice; it was distinctly audible to Dick, who turned a half-amused, half-cynical glance over his shoulder at the glowering youth. He was not in the least disturbed by Tommy's churlishness, understanding as he did, and to a certain extent sympathizing with, the spirit of

fierce partizanship that lay at the root of the boy's behavior.

But Jean had no such insight. She only knew that her brother had acted in a manner which, to say the least of it, was flagrantly discourteous. The blood flamed in her cheeks, as she said clearly:

"I hope you 'll overlook my brother's lack of breeding, Dick!"

Dick smiled at her, nodded, and was gone. The door had hardly closed behind him and the deputy, when Tommy rounded on Jean.

"You don't have to apologize for me, you know!" he snapped.

"The occasion seemed to require an apology from some one, and as no one else seemed inclined to make it"—her eyes, bright and a little strained, flashed at Ainsworth—"I did. What is the matter? What does it all mean?"

"All what?"

"Why, to express it mildly, Dick was treated with extreme discourtesy!"

"Well, what of it?" demanded Tommy, rudely. "He 's nothing but a cheap, pettifogging lawyer who 's wormed his way into politics, and—"

"Never mind that now, Tommy," his father interposed. "It is sufficient for Jean to know that Leighton is not a desirable acquaintance."

"Why, Father!" The girl's eyes widened in

amazement. She could hardly believe that she had heard aright.

"And I must request you to show him plainly that you do not care to associate with him."

For a moment Jean did not speak. Surprised, shocked, her first impulse was to spring to Dick's defense, to insist on an immediate explanation of an attitude that both amazed and bewildered her. What was it all about? What was back of all this unexpected and bitter antagonism? She said:

"I can't accept generalities of that sort, Father. Until I know—" She checked herself, and finished quietly: "But this is hardly the time to go into it, I think."

But for McAllister, she would have gone into it thoroughly, then and there; his presence definitely forbade the opening of a debate that, if it conformed to precedent, would lead to acrimonious dispute. And she had thought that chapter closed! She was beset with a curious impulse to laugh, not at her father, but at herself for her eager optimism in believing that in her absence the leopard had changed his spots. The brief vision that had been full of such alluring promise, faded. She saw herself confronted with a renewal of the old struggle.

Was it for this that she had abandoned her work in the city, where, as she knew she could admit without egotism, she was of real use, where her

efforts met with every encouragement, where she was an individual, with an individual's right to think and decide for herself?—for this cold, depressing atmosphere of arbitrary authority? The prospect left her suddenly weary and dispirited.

"Had n't we better run away, Jean, dear?" Her aunt's hand touched her arm tenderly. "These men want to talk business."

"Why, yes, Aunt Mary." The girl forced a smile. "I—I 'm tired, and I think I 'd like a cup of tea."

XI

WITH the departure of the ladies, McAllister's mask of easy unconcern fell. He twitched a chair up to the end of the table and sat down heavily.

"Well," he said, "it 's more than a rumor, Mr. Ainsworth. We 're not going to have any Sunday-school picnic this year. When you sent for me the other morning, I thought you were a little over anxious; but—confound it!—it looks like a serious matter! If Leighton gets much stronger, we 're going to have our hands full to beat him."

"We 've underestimated him all along," said Ainsworth. "I never had any feeling against him; in fact, I did n't object to his being elected sheriff. I thought that possibly he might be useful to us, and I regarded him as at least trustworthy, until this matter came up. The audacity of him!—trying to oust me from my own ticket!"

"He 's got gall enough for anything," Tommy said acidly.

McAllister shrugged.

"Well, he wants to be Congressman, not an also-ran. He knows as well as we do that there 's just

one party in this district, and his name on our ticket elects him. And, I tell you frankly, Mr. Ainsworth, I don't like the outlook. Leighton's vote for sheriff was practically unanimous, and he 's made good all along the line. He 's kept order downtown, and the funny part of it is, the roughnecks seem to like him for it. He 's stronger down there than anywhere else. The Hill is pretty evenly divided, from what I can make out. They 'd all pick him for sheriff again, but that 's your Congress bailiwick."

"It ought to be solid for us," said Tommy.

"Well, it 's got to be. If we could be sure of it, we need n't worry so much; but he 'll cut into the vote, take it from me."

"He 's a strong man, McAllister," Ainsworth said seriously; "a very strong man indeed."

"You 'd think so if you'd heard the crowd yelling for him down in the Square to-day," Tommy threw in.

McAllister nodded.

"I did. Everybody was wild over him. They wanted to pull him off his horse and ride him around on their shoulders; they 'd have done it too, if he 'd let them. Shouting and cheering and howling like a tribe of Comanche Indians. This damned Blake affair could n't have come at a worse time for us."

Tommy flung himself back in his chair and gave vent to a snort of disgust.

"Would n't it make you sick and tired? Just gives Leighton a chance to pull off a grand-stand stunt! That play of his, going down the flume and snaking Blake out—desperate villian, armed to the teeth, brave and handsome young hero, valiantly facing death from the desperado's revolver—oh, great movie stuff! Just the kind of thing that 'll make a lot of idiots think he 's the only thing that ever happened!" He snorted again, and dug down into his pocket for his cigarettes.

"And just at the time when the whole affair would ordinarily be forgotten," said the Congressman, "the trial will come up, and bring everything freshly to the public mind again"—he paused, and finished with stressful emphasis—"just before the primaries."

"I had n't thought of that," muttered McAllister, blankly. He knew that he should have thought of it, along with other disquieting matters to which Ainsworth had called his attention and which he had neglected on the comfortable hypothesis that Tommy had discovered a mare's nest, in the existence of which he had induced the Congressman to believe. McAllister had very little confidence in Tommy. He knew that the boy was an idler, and he had suspected him of deliberately dramatizing

the situation, merely for the sake of enhancing his own value as a henchman.

McAllister himself had been troubled by no misgivings. To him the nomination and subsequent election of David Ainsworth as Congressional representative had become a mere matter of form, a routine which must of necessity be gone through once every two years. It was part of the established order of things, originally instituted by Judge Gordon Randolph; no one had ever interfered with it, and it was ridiculous to suppose that any one ever would interfere, or even think of such a thing.

Only because Ainsworth had given him what amounted to a direct order, and with no remotest idea that there was any foundation whatsoever for it, had McAllister leisurely started out to investigate the rumor that an attempt would be made to substitute the name of Richard Leighton for that of the regular Congressional nominee.

What he learned in a very short space of time electrified and startled him. So far from being an easy-running, well-oiled machine, their organization stood in need of quick and intelligent attention. Some one had been putting sand in the gears. Some one, too, had been sowing the seeds of discontent in soil paradoxically made fertile by years of neglect. Promises unfulfilled, pledges ignored or else for-

gotten—words, words, words, when Randolph wanted and demanded deeds!

And the dissatisfaction was not confined to the section south of Squatter Creek, where, of course, nobody was ever satisfied with anything; it had spread to the Hill. Squire Moore, whose opinions carried considerable weight, made no bones about saying that he, for one, was convinced that young Leighton was the sort of representative who would be a credit to the community that sent him to Congress.

"Gordon Randolph believed in him and loved him like a son," the old Squire had argued to McAllister; "and Gordon Randolph never made a mistake in a man but once—when he backed Dave Ainsworth. That was mostly on account of Alice Nestor, too; Gordon set a lot of store by her. But he took Dave's measure years ago, and it 's my belief that he picked Dick Leighton to beat him, picked and trained him just for that. You can tell Dave I said so, if you like; it 's all one to me. I 'm not the only one who 's going to vote to suit himself this fall, McAllister."

Which statement McAllister was constrained to believe when he had pursued his investigation of Tommy's mare's nest a little farther. Ainsworth was a man of words; Leighton was a man of action. The district seemed to want action. The young

sheriff's spectacular arrest of Blake, was, as Tommy said, exactly the sort of thing best calculated to build up his already strong position.

"It 's the very devil!" McAllister burst out angrily. "The papers will be full of it: Leighton did this, and Leighton did that, and Leighton did the other thing! He 'll be all over the place! There 's no use in our trying to fool ourselves; there 's nothing on earth we can say or do that will turn people's attention away from the infernal business. I 'd forgotten about the trial. Dog-gone it!" He smashed his fist down on the table. "Why did n't the boys string that fellow up when they caught him?"

"For a Mexican bean they would have," said Tommy.

"Pity they don't do it now, then! It would save us a whole lot of trouble!"

"Yes; it would do more than that," Ainsworth said slowly. "It would put Leighton permanently out of politics."

"Whaddyemean—put him out of politics?" Tommy wanted to know.

"Simply that in every lynching there are people for and against the sheriff, no matter what he does," the Congressman replied.

Tommy turned in his chair and regarded his father curiously; but after puzzling his brains for

a moment he shook his head and leaned back with a shrug.

"Maybe I 'm dull," he said, "but I don't see what you 're driving at, Dad. What 's that got to do with putting Leighton out of the running?"

McAllister took it upon himself to explain:

"Well, suppose an attempt was made to string Blake up, and succeeded. There 'd be a hue and cry because the sheriff had failed to protect his prisoner—disgrace to the community, blot on the fair name of the State, and so forth, *ad libitum*, *ad infinitum*, *ad nauseam*. On the other hand, suppose the attempt was n't successful."

"It would n't be," said Tommy, promptly. "Dick Leighton may be a lot of unpleasant things, but he 's no coward. He 'd nip any little play like that right off the bat, believe me."

Ainsworth's eyebrows went up.

"You think so, Tommy? Just how would he do it?"

"Yes, how?" chimed in McAllister. "Defying a mob works out beautifully in theory; but in practice there's just one way to stop a crowd of hoodlums het up with whisky and excitement, and that is to hurt some of 'em, and hurt 'em quick and bad. At the next election the rest of 'em would express their opinion of the man who did it. That 's what your father means, my boy."

Tommy nodded.

"I see," he said slowly. "It would be a divided vote, anyway."

"And that," said Ainsworth, "is all we need. If in any way the downtown vote could be split, we are sure of enough support from the Hill to make the issue absolutely certain. Or, if we could solidify the Hill vote, the result would be a foregone conclusion."

McAllister began to beat a staccato tattoo on the table with his thumbs.

"If that crazy downtown bunch would only take it into their heads to lynch Blake, it would be a great bit of luck for us!" he said. "They 'd go after him for keeps, and the only way Leighton could prevent it would be to shoot some of the very crowd he 's strongest with. He 'd never do that. He knows which side his bread is buttered on, I guess! He 'd make his roughneck friends a present of Blake and throw a bluff of determined resistance overcome by force of numbers, which would do him a lot of good when we got after him!"

"There will be no attempt, of course," Ainsworth added; "but if there were, we certainly should not have to worry further about Mr. Leighton. And we could make a powerful campaign slogan out of the idea of fighting the man who would n't fight for the honor of the State—eh, McAllister?"

"Bully!" the editor responded with enthusiasm. "Corking! I'd condense it—it could be done—and run it right across the top of the first page of 'The Register.' Magnificent! Fighting the man who wouldn't fight for the honor of the State!"

"That's a grand little idea," Tommy conceded; "but suppose he *did* fight. What then?"

"The man's not a maniac!" McAllister retorted impatiently. "I tell you, Tommy, Dick Leighton's nobody's fool. How do you suppose he's got where he is to-day? By using his head, that's how! If he hadn't had one, and a pretty shrewd one, too, on his shoulders, do you think Gordon Randolph would have nursed him along into a partnership? Look at the things he's done, and then go back and figure out how he did 'em! Friends? He's got more friends right here in this town than you or I, or even your father! He makes 'em and he keeps 'em, because he knows they're the biggest asset he's got. There's hardly a man downtown who doesn't swear by him."

"That's true," Tommy agreed.

"Well, do you think he'd risk losing everything he's been working for, kick over the whole bucket of milk, just for the skin of a dirty murderer? Not much! One bullet into that crowd, and he couldn't get the job of dog-catcher—if they left him alive

to try it!" He stopped for breath, glancing over at Ainsworth, who nodded in approbation.

"I think, McAllister," the Congressman said, in his cold, incisive voice, "that you have put it very clearly. To resist is the one thing Leighton could not, and would not, do. If he killed any one in that crowd, the rest would make the town too hot to hold him. On the other hand, if he did not shoot, all right-thinking people would forever repudiate him—'the man who would n't fight for the honor of the State.' "

"Gee!" Tommy exclaimed enthusiastically. "What a peach of a chance for us! He 'd be between hell and the iron-works, would n't he! And I 'd like to see him squirm out!"

McAllister snapped his fingers impatiently.

"Well, let 's get down to business," he said. "All this is very instructive, but it is n't getting us anywhere. Blake 's locked up under guard, and the excitement downtown has all died away. Nobody 's going to stir it up again."

Ainsworth smiled slowly.

"There 's—er—considerable talk against Blake," he remarked.

"Yes, talk," grunted McAllister. "And that 's all there ever will be. Nobody 'll *do* anything."

"A pity, is n't it?" said Ainsworth, gently. "No one to take the initiative."

"No?" Tommy's quick glance went again to his father.

But the Congressman was not looking at him. The expressionless blue eyes were fixed on a beam of sunlight that slanted through the western window and lay like a narrow band of gold across the polished mahogany of the table top.

"No; I 'm afraid not," David Ainsworth said, still in the same gentle tone. He shook his head regretfully. "And that Blake is a worthless wretch. A trial would be nothing but a farce, anyway; there is no possible doubt of his guilt." He sighed. "It is most unfortunate," he said.

Tommy pushed back his chair and got to his feet. His eyes had not left his father's face. The hand that held the lighted match to his cigarette was trembling. He crossed the room and picked up his hat from a chair by the door.

"If you don't need me for anything, I—" he gulped, swallowed, and finally managed, almost naturally—"I guess I 'll walk downtown and see what 's going on."

Suddenly McAllister's jaw dropped; an expression of amazed incredulity swept over his face. He slumped down in his chair.

"My God!" he muttered, half in fear, half in sheer admiration.

With his hand on the door-knob, the boy turned.

Ainsworth had risen. The eyes of the two, father and son, met and held steadily for a moment. Then the Congressman spoke, abruptly, decisively.

"Be careful, Tommy," he said.

XII

DINNER was a rather silent meal. Miss Nestor strove valiantly to keep the conversational ball rolling, and Jean tried to do her part; but Ainsworth had little to say, and when he did talk, it was in a jerky, absent-minded manner that clearly showed his preoccupation. Tommy did not put in an appearance; but Ainsworth made no comment on his defection and, as soon as the sweet was brought in, excused himself and vanished into his study on the second floor.

"Let 's have our coffee served in the library, shall we?" suggested Miss Nestor. "I 've had the fire laid there. The nights are still cool enough for it to be agreeable."

Before the cheerful little blaze, the women talked of a thousand and one commonplaces; they had much to tell each other after their long separation. But Jean could not hold her attention to the almost feverish chatter of the elder woman, who, knowing the subject that was uppermost in her niece's mind, tried in every possible way to steer clear of it. To

the girl, however, it was too important to be long avoided. She broached it abruptly.

"Aunt Mary," she said, "I want to know what is the trouble between Father and Dick. They used to be perfectly good friends. What has happened?"

"I don't know," said Miss Nestor, honestly, resigning herself to the inevitable. "Of course there 's something; I can see that. And it 's something comparatively recent, because your father was pleasant enough to him when we all met at the memorial service for Judge Randolph. They shook hands, and David told Mr. Leighton he wished him every success, that he liked to see a young man forging ahead. That was about six weeks ago, so it must have been something that has happened since then."

"Do you know of anything that Dick has done? Have you heard of anything, Aunt Mary?"

Miss Nestor shook her head.

"Not a thing. He 's been getting on splendidly with his law work. I dare say you know of that big case he had against the railroad. Every one said he had n't a chance, but he won it easily, and I understand he received a very large fee. Since then—I don't recall anything in particular; at least, there 's been no especial comment about any one case. But both your father and Tommy seem to think Mr. Leighton has done something dishonorable. They disparage him whenever they speak of him, call him

a cheap shyster, and say he is n't a fit associate for you."

"Did Father happen to be interested on the other side of that railroad case Dick won?" asked Jean, with thin irony.

"Oh, no! That was some time before the Judge died. In fact, I believe David congratulated Mr. Leighton on his clever speech to the jury. No, Jean; whatever it is, it 's something much more recent than that. The first time I noticed that there was anything wrong was yesterday afternoon. The way David spoke surprised and troubled me very much. I asked for an explanation, but"—she made an expressive gesture—"well, you know your father, Jean. He would tell me nothing."

"He will tell me," Jean said quietly. "I should have had it out with him before dinner, if Mr. McAllister had n't been there. And with Tommy, too. He behaved abominably. By the way, where is Tommy? Why did n't he come home to dinner?" It was a perfectly natural question, asked in a perfectly natural way, but Miss Nestor sensed the hurt that lay behind it. Jean loved Tommy; that the boy should deliberately absent himself on the first evening his sister was in the house both mortified and distressed the little lady, who had been so anxious that Jean's home-coming should prove everything to be desired. She said hastily:

"Oh, Tommy is just like other boys—and men, too, for that matter. He thinks a house runs itself, and does n't realize how much easier it makes things if one knows how many to prepare for. He often stays away for meals."

"But I don't often come home after being away for nearly four years, Aunt Mary. One would think he might have managed to be disengaged for this one evening. And my father, too. Are his affairs so pressing that he has to rush away from the dinner-table and shut himself up in his study, with hardly a word to me?"

Miss Nestor looked on the verge of tears; her lips quivered.

"Oh, please, don't mind me, Aunt Mary," Jean exclaimed in quick contrition. "I 'm horrid. Only —I *was* a little hurt, I admit. It seems so unlike Tommy. I thought both he and Father might have been a little more cordial."

Miss Nestor nodded, blinking the tears from her eyes.

"I—I don't understand it, Jean," she confessed. "There 's some mystery here."

"There is; and I mean to get to the bottom of it," the girl said grimly. "But we can 't do it now, so there 's no use talking about it. Let 's find a pleasanter topic. How is Squire Moore's wife? I had such a charming little note from her not long ago,

telling me that she was looking forward to my return, and asking me to come to see her, as she was n't well enough to come to see me."

But their efforts to make conversation flow naturally, were not very successful. Jean was perturbed and uneasy; as the evening wore on, her restlessness increased. She could not concentrate her mind on Randolph's doings and sayings: her thoughts would turn back to the unfortunate business of the afternoon, to the inexplicable behavior of her father and brother, not only toward Dick, with whom their relations had hitherto been amicable enough, but toward herself. She seemed unable to sit still. She moved irresolutely about the room, picking up a book here, an ornament there. Finally:

"Aunt Mary, would you mind very much if I went for a little walk?" she asked. "I think perhaps the exercise would make me sleep better."

"Why, of course not, child. Run along, if you want to. I dare say the air will be good for you. But remember you 've had a long trip to-day, and don't tire yourself too much."

"Oh, I sha'n't be gone long," Jean promised. She put on her hat, and slipped a long cape over the plain white linen frock for which she had exchanged her cloth traveling-suit.

It was warmer outdoors than in the house, but there was a slight breeze, laden with the fragrance of

spring blossoms, that swayed the boughs of the giant elms, and stirred the heavy young foliage to a slurring rustle. Jean lifted her face to it gratefully, as she went along at a smooth, unhurried pace. It seemed to rest her, to soothe her mind, beset by a cloud of vague doubts and apprehensions. The ominous portent, the dread of she knew not what, allowed itself to be forced into the background. Not banished altogether. It was there, hovering like some baleful thing, and there it would remain until all the mystery and uncertainty were cleared up.

But to-night she would puzzle no more. She was back in Randolph, in the town in which she had been born. She loved every inch of it—its crooked, independent streets, that seemed to have an individuality each of its own; its uneven pavements—she remembered every depression and broken stone—its houses, its stores. There was a new blouse shop, jaunty enough to light its narrow windows with electric bulbs in tin reflectors. The dolorous Indian maiden in front of the tobacco and barber shop had been replaced by a gaudy striped pole that revolved dizzily.

Jean's interested eyes took in the changes, great and small. She saw a number of people she knew, but she avoided speaking to them, a not too difficult matter, since nearly every one down street seemed to

be attached to some group or other with an engrossing topic of conversation. The Greek's was crowded. Jean crossed the avenue and turned off above the market. She walked steadily, aimlessly, rounding now this corner, now that, absorbed in her own thoughts.

Minerva may have sprung, full-bodied, from the brow of Jove, but a hospital does not similarly spring full-fashioned from the brow of a hill. There are architects to be consulted, plans to be conceived, drawn up, and approved, bids to be advertised for and contracts let—a host of details, large and small, that no incantations or wand-waving can settle in a moment's time. All this and more before a single shovelful of earth can be taken from the ground or a single stone of the foundation laid.

And yet, to Jean, standing at the foot of the gentle declivity known as Maple Hill, it seemed that nothing short of wizardry could have brought into being the long white building that rested on the top of the slope like a splendid crown on the head of some crouching giant. The full moon, just rising over the distant tree-tops, thrust the mass out in dark silhouette, tipping the roofs and chimneys with cloudy silver. The thick Ionic columns, ranked across the front, stood tall and whitely nebulous, like swathed ghosts in the uncertain, diffused radiance. From an upper window a single spot of orange-red

light glowed, intensifying the impression of some huge Clyclopean monster brooding over the town.

For his eye was growing mellow,
Rich and ripe and red and yellow,
As was time, since old Ulysses made him bellow in the dark!
Since Ulysses bunged his eye up with a pine-torch in the dark!

The fragment of verse drifted vagrantly across Jean's mind, and brought a little smile to her lips.

The hospital, so urgently needed, the gift of her father's hand, outstretched in generous aid to the town. He could give this way, magnificently, with no thought of self, to Randolph; he was prodigal of his money, of his time, expecting, asking no return save the good of his fellow men. Surely, he could not be hard, cold, autocratically domineering as he seemed to be. And yet—

Were they pines among the boulders
Or the hair upon his shoulders? . . .

With a rush, doubt, restlessness, aching uncertainty were upon her again.

"I can't wait," she cried aloud to the shadowy bulk above her. "I've got to know."

Dick was up there, somewhere back of that baleful red-and-yellow eye. She had not meant to come to him to-night; unconsciously her steps had taken her to the hospital. Perhaps the insistent desire within her, the urge to solve this mystery had di-

rected them without her actual volition; but it did not matter. She was here now. She would see Dick, talk with him, ask him frankly the meaning of all that perplexed and puzzled her.

The street was quite deserted; not a soul was in sight. Below her the town lay, dark and still; still with a sort of uneasy silence that was, somehow, disquieting. She felt strangely oppressed, a little nervous.

She turned and walked quickly up the rough path toward the porch, where between the columns gaped the wide, empty doorway.

XIII

IN the small white-walled room where Cass Blake lay on a bed hastily carted over from the jail, Doctor Evans had given the nurse minute directions as to what to do, and how and when to do it. She said that she understood perfectly—"Oh, yes, indeed, Doctor Evans; you 've made everything *quite* plain"—but the doctor's mind was not at ease. He was frowning when he finally stepped out into the big bare corridor where Bill Murray was on guard.

At the sound of the closing door the deputy swung round on the low stool that was the sole article of furniture visible.

"Well, Doc," he inquired, "has he croaked?"

"Not yet," returned the doctor. The frown disappeared, giving place to a pleasant smile, as he added cheerfully: "Oh, I guess, barring accidents, we 'll get him into shape."

"What 's he doin' now?" Murray wanted to know.

"He 's still unconscious."

"Um."

"One shot went right through him; the other is lodged somewhere in the left breast, but his heart

action is pretty weak, and I have n't dared probe for the bullet. I 'll have to build him up a bit first."

"Um. I would," said Murray, darkly. "Say," he demanded all at once, "what do you bother with the skunk for, anyhow? Best thing to cure him is the limb of a tree an' ten foot o' rope. Why don't you leave him croak?"

Evans shook his head.

"The State will attend to that, Bill. It 's up to me to get him well, if I can."

"Wish 't was up to me. *I 'd* build him up—high."

"I 'll bet you would," laughed the doctor. "You 're crazy about him, are n't you, Bill?"

"Um!" grunted Murray. "Plumb. Goin' to have a hard winter, Doc. Like to know he was where he would n't suffer none from the cold."

"Well, you 're not the only one," the doctor told him.

Nor was he. For once in its history there was no division of public sentiment in Randolph. In dining-room and drawing-room on the Hill, in kitchen and saloon bar on the Flats, there was but one topic and one opinion: the most severe penalty of the law was too lenient a punishment for Cass Blake. Family groups on comfortable screened porches, neighbors in adjoining gardens, knots of

mill-hands on street corners and in shop doorways, discussed the crime and excoriated the criminal. There had been other crimes in Randolph; there had been none like this. In all the years of his life there, the little doctor could not remember when the town had been so shocked and outraged.

"There 's some one comin'," Murray said, leaning forward to peer toward the stone stairway just beyond the double doors. "Likely it 's Dick to—no, it ain't. It 's Miss Jean!"

"Miss Ainsworth!" The doctor's face lighted up; he went quickly forward. "Well, this is a pleasure! I knew you were expected, but we 've had so much excitement here to-day that I neglected to inquire about your arrival." He beamed at her over the rims of his round glasses. "Well, well! And so you thought you 'd come right over and see the new hospital! Could n't wait to make sure Randolph was as up to date as they are in the big city, eh? Well, it is! We 've got a mighty fine building here; you can be just as proud of it as you like." He had always liked Jean, "Alice's girl," but he had never quite forgiven her mother for accepting David Ainsworth when she might have married Gordon Randolph. "Your father was anxious to have you consulted before any equipment was bought," he said. "He has promised us the best of everything, and he wanted to have your

ideas carried out. In a short time Cresston will be sending patients to Randolph, instead of the other way round. Of course, there 's a lot to be done before we can handle cases; this little matter today is a trifle premature."

"Oh, yes; you mean Blake." Jean brought her attention back to the doctor and what he was saying; she concealed her disappointment at not finding Dick. "He 's pretty badly hurt, is n't he, Doctor?"

"About as badly as a human can be—and live. It was touch and go for a little while, but I think he 'll pull through now, with careful watching. I 've got a nurse on the job, and—" He stopped, as the door behind him opened noisily, and a young woman in a stiffly starched white uniform stumbled out. She was pale to the lips.

"I can't stand it, Doctor," she said, in a trembling voice. "I—I 'm going home."

"What?" demanded Evans. "You 're going home? Miss Joyce—"

"Oh, I know, Doctor. I said I 'd stay, but I did n't realize—oh, it 's horrible!—horrible!" Her chin was quivering; her fingers twisted in and out, winding themselves in a corner of her apron.

"Here, here, this won't do, my dear," the doctor said, advancing toward her in a businesslike manner. "You 're a little hysterical, that 's all. You 'll be all right in a few minutes. I 'll just give you—"

"I—I 'm not!" she interrupted vehemently. "I 'm just—just—" She choked into a burst of tears.

The doctor thrust his hands into his trousers' pockets and scowled belligerently.

"But you can't leave the man without a nurse!" he bristled. "What 's the matter with you, anyway? I know Blake is n't a pleasant object, but he 's perfectly harmless. I 'll give you a little sedative, and you 'll feel all right in no time."

"Of course she will," Jean added encouragingly. Her training told her at once what was the matter; it was not the first time she had seen a bad case of "nerves" in an inexperienced nurse. "I 'm sure Miss Joyce won't leave you in the lurch, Doctor Evans; she 'll stay."

"No, I won't! I—I can't," sobbed the nurse, hysterically. "I 'm going home."

"You 'll have to keep yourself better in hand, Miss Joyce, if you 're ever going to be entitled to that uniform you 're wearing," the doctor rebuked her grimly. "You 've got to learn that there 's a whole lot more to nursing than just looking pretty and holding hands with a nice patient. Come now, let 's have no more nonsense about this!" Under ordinary circumstances, he would not have argued about her remaining; indeed, he would not have waited for her to say she was leaving; he would

have packed her off at the first word. But there was no one else to be had, and although annoyance was fast giving way to exasperation he dared not express himself as he wanted to.

There were at least half a dozen nurses in Randolph, properly trained and competent; but four of them were unavailable, and, of the two whom he had managed to reach, one was ill with tonsilitis and unable to leave the house, and the other had refused point-blank to take the case. He had pleaded, argued, threatened; in vain.

"I don't care if you never send for me again as long as I live," she had told him over the telephone. "Norah Foster was a friend of mine, and, ethics or no ethics, I 'd starve in the streets before I 'd lift a finger to help that filthy beast." Then she had hung up the receiver; and the little doctor, as a man sympathizing with her, even while, as a physician, he condemned her stand, had rung up somebody else.

He had spent a full hour at the telephone before he got into communication with Miss Joyce, who had sent in an application for a place on the nursing staff of the hospital when it should be opened. She was not the nurse he would have selected; she had had but little training, and her inexperience showed in her over-confidence of her ability; but the doctor had no choice.

Jean stepped forward and laid her hand on the weeping girl's arm.

"You know, my dear," she said kindly, "if you want to be a trained nurse, you 'll have to forget your personal prejudices. A patient, any patient at all, must be 'a case,' as far as you are concerned; you 've got to look at them all impersonally." Her fingers closed gently over the arm she held. "Now, won't you sit down, and try to remember only that a life is in danger, and that you are there to save it?"

"I won't! I 'm not going into that room again!"

"But it is your work, Miss Joyce!"—with a hint of sternness.

"I don't care if it is!" gasped the nurse. She wrenched her arm loose and backed away, dabbing at her wet eyes with her handkerchief. "I don't care if it is!" she repeated, looking from Jean to the disgusted doctor and back. "It 's yours too!" she flared out excitedly. "You 're a nurse; why don't *you* stay with him?"

There was a moment's pause before Jean said, very quietly:

"Very well, Miss Joyce. If you 'll kindly let me take that apron, I will."

"What?" Evans exclaimed in amazement.

"Yes; certainly."

"But it 's not an agreeable task. Are you quite sure you—"

"It would n't be the first disagreeable thing I 've had to do, Doctor," Jean interrupted composedly, "and it probably won't be the last. When I took up my profession I understood that it was n't a question of my preference, but of where I was needed."

"There 's a sane, professional point of view for you!" crowed the doctor, clapping his hands together. "Take my advice and think it over, Miss Joyce!"

But if the young woman acted on the suggestion, it was only during the time it took her to pull off her apron and toss it on the floor. Then, without a word, she marched out, her head in the air.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"Good riddance!" said he. "Think you 'd like to have her on the staff, Miss Ainsworth?"

"I 'm afraid not, Doctor. She 'll never make a reliable nurse. She 's too hysterical."

"Said she were n't hysterical," observed Murray, picking up the discarded apron, to hand it to Jean. "I once knowed a woman say she were n't curious."

"Just a moment," the doctor interposed, a little anxiously, as Jean held out her hand for the apron. "Don't you think you 'd better have a look at your

patient before you definitely decide to stay, Miss Ainsworth? I hate to practically force this case upon you—" He relaxed with a sigh of relief at Jean's quietly reassuring smile. "A fine young woman, Bill," he said in a low tone. "She takes her work seriously. Maybe when she starts in here she can hammer some common sense into these dummies that call themselves nurses. I liked the way she talked about her duty to her profession."

"Um," grunted the deputy. "Duty 's a fine thing to a woman, when some one else has to do it. Don't holler afore you 're out of the woods, Doc; she ain't seen him yet."

"That 'll make no difference," the doctor said confidently. "If he were ten times as bad, she 'd stick on the job. She 's a real nurse."

"Um. Too bad t'other one went."

"Too bad? What do you mean?"

Murray slowly shifted one leg over the other.

"She were n't no damn' good," he said. "She 'd 'a' cured him—right."

XIV

DOCTOR EVANS was not the only physician in Randolph. There were two others—clever, progressive young men, careful and assiduous in the care of their patients; but Mrs. Moore said she would just as soon have a cat doctor *her.* Though she was never the first by whom the new are tried, she was, if not at the very end of the procession, at least among the last to lay the old on the back of the shelf. For twenty years she had called in Doctor Evans when she had one of her "spells"; she would have gone to her grave rather than permit the Squire to summon somebody else.

Jean Ainsworth being installed as nurse to the prisoner at the hospital, the doctor felt that with a clear conscience he could leave her in charge while he attended Mrs. Moore and another patient who had sent for him. He went briskly off, promising to return in half an hour, or an hour at most. There being no telephone connection at the hospital, he would, he said, ring up Miss Nestor from the drug store, and explain the situation that had arisen.

Jean removed her hat and wrap, donned the white

apron discarded by Miss Joyce, and looked into Blake's room to assure herself that he needed no immediate attention. There was no change in his condition; he still lay in a state of coma. There was nothing to be done until he should regain consciousness. The air was warm in the little room, heavy with the odor of antiseptics. Jean went back into the corridor, leaving the door partly ajar so that the slightest sound would reach her.

Bill Murray, yawning over his pipe, glanced up with a non-committal nod when she appeared.

"Surprise for Dick, findin' you here," he said. "Ought to be along pretty quick now. Great feller, Dick."

Jean was no less pleased at one bit of information than at the other. Woman-like, she wanted every one to think well of the man she loved; and there had been real feeling in the deputy's comment.

"You like him, then?" she asked.

"Some!" Murray returned emphatically. "Don't you?"

"Why, why—yes, of course," she stammered, a little confused by the blunt directness of the question.

"Most of 'em do."

"Most what?"

"Most women."

"Oh!" she murmured blankly.

"But he ain't got no use for 'em. He 's all business. Just tends to his knittin' and lets 'em play by their lones. Is *he*"—jerking his thumb over his shoulder—"built up any?"

"Built up?" Jean repeated, in mystification.

"I mean, is he cured yet?"

"He 's still unconscious."

"Um. No luck."

"You were speaking of Dick," Jean reminded him.

"Um. Dick. Ain't a smarter feller in town. Got to get to the hen-roost mighty early to beat him to it."

"Yes?"

"Betcher! He 's honest, but he ain't foolish. An' if he sees anything he wants, he goes after it. If it 's nailed down, he takes it anyhow, an' the nail holes don't show. Great feller!"

The deputy was waxing eloquent. His admiration for Dick Leighton was sincere and genuine; in all Randolph, the young sheriff had no more stanch supporter than Bill Murray, who never lost an opportunity to sow a few seeds where in his opinion they would do the most good. He had quickly divined Jean's interest in Dick. He had long been aware of Dick's own state of mind; and in praising the young man, after his fashion, he conceived that he was by way of assisting in a worthy cause. He

went on enthusiastically, oblivious of the little pucker that had appeared in Jean's forehead:

"O' course, some is suspicious of him; but that 's because he knows a lot more 'n they do. 'Nough to make a feller suspicious, that is. And smart! Anybody that tries to knife Dick in the back wants to look up his sleeve first. He believes in doin' afore he 's done."

"You mean he fights the devil with fire?"

"Um," nodded Murray. "Hot fire, too. Just a *leetle* hotter 'n the other feller's; not hot enough to burn his fingers."

"I see," said Jean, slowly. She turned and walked back into Blake's room. She did see, rather too clearly. There *was* something, then, there must be something. A miserable sense of depression came over her.

She heard quick footsteps on the stairs, and a cheery:

"Hello, Bill! Where 's the doc?"

"Gone out"—in Murray's laconic tones. "Squire Moore's wife got a mis'ry."

"You 're all alone?"

"Me an' the nurse. She 's in there, buildin' him up. But he ain't cured yet."

Despite herself Jean smiled as she stepped out into the corridor.

"Jean!" Dick exclaimed. "Well, for Heaven's

sake, what are you doing here? Surely *you* 're not the nurse?"

She nodded.

"Doctor Evans could n't get any one else, so I said I 'd help him out."

"Why, Jean, you ought n't to have done that!"

"What I said!" contributed Murray, triumphantly. "Oughter kept t'other one."

"Why should you be mixed up with a case like this?" Dick protested. "And after an all-day trip —why, Evans must be crazy to expect you to work! And this sort of thing—"

She interrupted him.

"What do you suppose I 've been doing in New York—attending garden parties? I 'm not tired, and Doctor Evans did n't send for me, either. I went out for a walk and came up here. The nurse was just leaving, and I offered to take her place. Now you know all about it."

"But what did they say at home?" he persisted.

"Nothing. They don't know it yet. Doctor Evans is going to telephone the house so they won't worry. Father was busy when I left, and Tommy did n't get home for dinner. Aunt Mary and I talked for a little while, but I wanted to get out and see what the town looked like, and—"

"And the hospital?" he asked, with twinkling eyes.

"Exactly. And here I am."

"Yes; here you are!" he echoed, smiling down at her.

"So 'm I," remarked the deputy, dolefully. "An' I ain't had no dinner nor supper, neither."

"Oh, that 's a shame!" the girl exclaimed. "Can't he go out and get something to eat, Dick?"

"Why, of course he can. I came over to relieve him. You go right along, Bill; and take your time."

The deputy got up from the stool and edged toward the door.

"Kinder hate to leave you," he said with assumed reluctance. "But I got to eat, I s'pose." He looked from one to the other, slyly benign. "You 'll see Dick ain't lonely, ma'am, won't you?" he begged Jean. "An' take good care o' *him* in there. Don't let nothin' happen to him. Whole lot o' people 'd be awful upset if he was n't cured proper—the low-down cuss!"

"Is n't he a joy, Dick?" Jean laughed, when he had clattered down the stairs. "That funny way he has of clipping his sentences. And no matter what he says, he never smiles."

"He 's the finest fellow in the world," Dick said warmly, "and one of the best friends I 've got. I 'd bank on Bill Murray any time; and so would any one who really knows him. The boys downtown

follow him like sheep; and he 's a bad man in a scrap. That 's why I swore him in as deputy: when there 's any trouble I want him on my side. But never mind about Bill now. I want to talk about *you*. It seems ages since I saw you in New York."

"Why, it was only a little over three months ago, really a very short time," she said demurely. It had not seemed a short time to her, but Jean, for all her frankness and honesty, was very feminine indeed.

"Only a little over three months!" he echoed. "A quarter of a year, and more. Maybe you 'd think it a long while if you 'd been in this town all alone."

"Alone? But you were n't alone, Dick!"

"There was n't a soul in Randolph—with you in New York," he declared solemnly. "Jean, dear—"

"It 's really awfully good to be here!" she interrupted hastily. "After all—I know it sounds trite, but it 's true—there *is* no place like home, and no folks like home folks."

"You 're right," he said, accepting the diversion philosophically. "I 've always felt that way about it. Most of the fellows in Randolph want to go to the city just as soon as they grow up; but I 've always thought that there were plenty of chances right here. Of course, one has to hustle."

"You seem to have hustled to some purpose," Jean said. "That last letter Judge Randolph wrote me, just a little while before he died, was full of you and what you had done. Oh, he was so proud of you, Dick! And every one speaks of how successful you 've been."

Dick shrugged.

"Every one? I 'm afraid there are some who don't love me for my success, if you choose to dignify it by that name."

Jean's face clouded again. She said seriously:

"I suspect that 's true, Dick, and it troubles me. There—there 's something I want to talk to you about. You may think I 've chosen a strange time —our first talk together, and the beginning of that—but it worries me, Dick, and I want it cleared up, at once."

"Why, my dear girl, anything that troubles you must be cleared up—and it shall be! Wait until I get something to sit on, and then you shall tell me what it is." He drew up Murray's stool for her, and fetched an empty hardware box for himself. "Now,then," he said, "fire away!" His smile was so frank and open, the eyes that met hers squarely were so clear and honest and candid, that her heart smote her for allowing herself to entertain even the smallest doubt of him.

XV

IT was difficult to begin, harder even than she had expected, to bring up against him what amounted to a tacit accusation. But Jean Ainsworth had inherited nothing of her father's subtlety and diplomatic evasiveness. Straightforward, direct, she struck without preamble, straight at the root of the matter.

"I want you to tell me, Dick, why my father and Tommy acted toward you as they did this afternoon," she said. "I could n't ask them about it at the time because Mr. McAllister was there and I preferred not to discuss personal affairs before him. There was very little said after you 'd gone, but it was evident that both of them are under the impression that some of the things you 've done are n't just exactly—well, honorable. Of course, I know they 're wrong, but how did they get the idea?"

"They don't like me," returned Dick, promptly. "The fact is, our relations are n't very friendly just now. You see—"

"No, that is n't it. Because Tommy and Father are n't the only ones. Before you came in I was

talking to Mr. Murray, and you say he is one of the best friends you have."

"What did he say?"

"Oh, he was perfectly loyal to you!" Jean said quickly. "Indeed, he thought he was praising you. He was speaking about your success, and how much he thought of you—but there was the same implication, Dick."

"That I 'd done something dishonorable?"

She shook her head.

"No, not exactly that; and yet—in a way, it is. It 's a question of your methods, Dick, as if they were n't quite what they ought to be; as if you were inclined to sharp practice. *I* know it 's all a mistake; but—is there anything you could have done to give any foundation for it, Dick?"

The young man rose from the box, and stood with knitted brows, his hands thrust into his trousers' pockets. Finally:

"Jean, as far as I can see, I 've always run pretty straight," he said. "You know, I was raised in a hard school, where the motto was 'Every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost.' Sometimes a lot of us would want the same thing, and we 'd all go after it, hard. When some one got hurt on the way, it was n't our fault; it was his misfortune. We all took conditions as we found them, and used the weapons at hand. Maybe the

ones who got hurt would say the weapons were n't the right kind; but when you 're in the midst of a real fight you can't stop to pick and choose: you 're too busy."

"Do *you* think they were the right kind of weapons, Dick?" she asked gravely.

"They were the same as the others used."

It was not a very strong argument. It savored too much of that specious excuse that has been called the first law of nature, and used as a defense for ruthlessness ever since the world began. But Jean understood its significance. While she possessed little intimate knowledge of the "school" in which Dick Leighton had received his early training, she knew Randolph conditions and Randolph methods. They were, perhaps, no worse than and no different from those to be found in the average small manufacturing town; they were the outgrowth of a system wrong in its inception and pernicious in many of its results. And all her life Jean had known Gordon Randolph. Upright and honorable himself, his personal example and its influence over Dick, when the boy's mind was at its most malleable stage, could have been for nothing but good. But what of the appeal of the cynical philosophy he preached without practising? Could any one be intimately associated with him, and not be swayed from black to white until a clear per-

ception of either became impossible and both appeared to be gray?

Jean was barely twenty-four years old; her own philosophy of life was as untried as it was uncompromising; and, as earnestly expounded by her, was likely to sound narrow and priggish; but she clung passionately to the standards she had set up as the proper ones. That Dick might have fallen short of them disquieted her only because of the past. Of the future she had no fear. He had made no deliberate choice between right and wrong; he was simply blind to the line of demarcation that to her seemed sharp and clear. He had followed the trail that other men had blazed; the way was not of his own making.

"I think I understand, Dick," she said slowly. "But you are n't like 'the others' that you speak of; you 're different. I know it, and I want every one to know it, too. To me you 're too fine, too worth while to give any one the slightest ground to condemn you."

Dick laughed shortly.

"My dear girl," he said, "even if I were half as good as you 're sweet enough to imagine, that would be a large order. 'Ground to condemn,' usually depends on whether or not you 're in the other fellow's way. I think I 've played pretty square. But I don't mind admitting," he added

candidly, "that sometimes I 've been so busy watching the goal ahead that I have n't paid as much attention as I might to the path that led to it." There came to him a mental picture of a high Colonial bed, with a white-haired old man propped up among lavender-scented pillows. "It was," he said, "what Judge Randolph used to call being 'clever.' "

"And it 's what I don't want you to do, Dick," Jean said bluntly. "We 've been friends for so many years that I feel I may speak plainly without the risk of giving offense. All my life I 've thought of you as one who would n't even dream of considering a compromise with his conscience; one who, when he was confronted with an issue, would face and meet it squarely. I 've never doubted you, Dick, even in the smallest thing. I 've been proud of you, proud because you were my friend. And, Dick, I think there are a great many other people who believe in you just as I do. Only a few, a very few, have been misled by these 'clever' things you 've done. I want you to set them right for the future, to let them see you as the man I know you really are. Will you do it, Dick?"

He had stopped beside her, looking down into the earnest young eyes that were for him the eyes of the world.

"Oh, Jean, dear, I could be anything, do anything, for you!" he said. He moved closer to her, and there was that in his voice that called a slow, soft flush to her cheeks. "You know what 's been in my heart all these years, what I 've longed to say to you. There has never been any one but you in my life; I 've never had a single thought except for you. It 's what I 've been working for, hoping for, planning for—the day I could go to you and tell you that I loved you. I 've been proud of your friendship; but friendship is n't what I want, not from you, Jean. I want your love—and you. Tell me, do you think you could care enough for me to marry me?"

She lifted shy, glad eyes to his.

"Yes, Dick," she said simply. And then she was in his arms, and he was holding her as if he would never let her go.

It was not as either of them had thought it would be. At the back of the Ainsworth garden was a little vine-clad arbor, where as children they had played at keeping house, where in the first flush of adolescence they had mutually confided their hopes and ambitions, and discussed the weighty problems the future presents to seventeen. It was there that Dick had sometimes day-dreamed of telling Jean of his love for her; there, too, that she had visioned the scene that should mark the fruition of all her

girlish hopes. They were to have sat side by side on the circular rustic bench, with the perfume of roses and honeysuckle filling the air about them, and the moonlight filtering in through the leaves to dapple shadows on the earthen floor.

But if one has the time and the loved one, it seems that the place does not so much matter. To Jean and Dick the bare, white-walled corridor of the hospital was transformed into an enchanted garden, where in a miracle of silvered moonlight cherished dreams came true.

In all the passion of his love for her there was so much of tenderness, so much of reverence, fostered, perhaps, by those years in which it had seemed to him almost impossible that he should ever win her. Even now, with her in his arms, her heart beating close to his heart, he could hardly believe that she was his.

"When did you know?" he whispered, his lips against her hair.

"I don't quite remember," she whispered back. "You see, it was so very long ago; I think perhaps it may have been that day you kissed me in the arbor—do you remember? And ever since then I 've been waiting for you."

He did remember. Never since had he kissed her—until now. Yet it seemed to him, oddly, that all the years between had been wiped from the slate

of Time, and that those moments in the arbor were of the present, and not of the past.

"Oh, Jean, Jean!" he said, very low, and caught her to him again.

"You were such a funny little boy, Dick," she told him. "Do you remember the night you assured me that the moon was made of solid silver, and that you were going to climb the cherry-tree and knock it out of the sky for me with a clothes-pole when you grew up? You were so sure you could do it that you made me believe it, too, and I was awfully pleased, because I liked that moon!" She pointed out the window where, above the distant hills, the great luminous sphere swung high in a pale sky, serene with stars. "I wonder," she said, "how many other solemn little boys have meant to knock down the moon with a clothes-pole!"

"It was n't a clothes-pole," he contradicted; "it was a fishing-pole. And the name of the solemn little fool is legion. But I meant to get the moon for you, Jean, because you wanted it; I meant to get anything and everything that you wanted, so that I could give it to you."

"If that was your ambition, you 've succeeded in it, Dick," she said softly.

He turned upward the palm of first one of her hands and then the other, kissing each in turn.

"Dear!" he said. "But I have n't succeeded,

quite. My love for you is the very best there is in me, but it is n't good enough. I 'm going to try to make it so. The things you don't approve of are in the past. I 'm going to make the future different, if I can; everything straightforward, open and aboveboard; no more dodging the issue, whatever it is."

"I don't believe you ever *did* dodge or evade, actually, Dick. The real *you* did n't, anyway. It was only when there was wrong on both sides, or the outcome worked no downright harm to any one, that you were 'clever.' Don't tell me I 'm not right about you, Dick; I know I am."

XVI

IT was wonderful, that trust of hers in him; wonderful. With a feeling akin to awe he told himself that come what might he would strive to be worthy of it, and of her.

"I 've been looking forward so to coming home," Jean said, leaning her head back against his broad shoulder as they stood together at the window. " 'Home' meant seeing you. Those New York trips of yours were always so brief, so soon over. It seemed that I 'd hardly time to say a dozen words to you before you had vanished, and then there would be months and months before I saw you again! But now—"

"But now," he caught up her unfinished sentence, "neither of us is ever going away anywhere without the other! You ran away from me once, Jean, left me here all alone. Now that I have you again, I 'm going to hold you—so—and never let you go. My Jean—mine!"

She swayed to him; her arms went up and around his neck.

And then, across the silvered silence there struck a low, quivering moan, a sound that made Jean draw

back and catch her breath with something like a shudder. The radiance in her face dimmed into troubled gravity. With swift, silent steps she crossed the corridor and went into Blake's room. Dick would have followed, but she shook her head, waving him back. He sat down on the stool outside the door and waited for her to reappear. She was absent but a moment.

"Is he conscious yet?" Dick asked, his face as grave as her own.

"Not yet; he has n't stirred. But I think it won't be long before he is."

"Anything I can do?"

"No. Doctor Evans should be here any moment now. He said he would n't be gone more than an hour, probably not so long."

Dick surrendered the stool to her, and pushed forward the hardware box for himself; but he did not sit down. He said seriously:

"Jean, before Evans gets back, there 's something I want to talk over with you. You know, your father is n't going to be pleased."

She smiled at him with the proud tenderness of the woman to whom doubt has ceased to exist.

"That 's only because he 's gotten a wrong impression of you, Dick; he does n't understand. Father is over-quick to judge sometimes, I 'm afraid, and after he 's made up his mind it 's not easy to get

him to change it. But he has always liked you and spoken well of you. When he finds out he 's been acting on a mistaken hypothesis, I 'm sure he 'll be glad. He just does n't understand now."

But Dick shook his head.

"No, it 's something more than just a personal prejudice. I dare say that in his place I might have something of the same feeling, though I 'm not sure; he and I don't look at things from the same angle. However, there it is. There has been a development during the past two months that I 've been wanting to consult you about. I could n't very well write of it; it 's too long a story, and I thought we ought to thresh it out together, pro and con. It 's nothing that can be decided just off-hand; it has too important a bearing on our future, yours and mine. You see—" He broke off, listening intently.

From the lower floor there came the sound of hurrying feet; they were running along the hall and up the stairs. In another instant Doctor Evans burst into view, breathless and panting. At sight of Dick, he flung up his arms.

"Leighton!" he shouted, "they 're going to lynch Blake!"

"*What?* How do you know?"

"Bud McFee told me. I was just coming up the steps—"

"What did he say?"

"He said: 'Tell Dick to be careful. The boys are coming right up to get Blake.'" The little doctor wiped the beads of perspiration from his forehead. "What are we going to do?"

"We 've got to get Blake out of here!"

"But we can't move him, Leighton," Evans protested.

"If we don't the boys will—and mighty quick! Go get a car or a wagon—run!"

"It will kill him, I tell you! The least thing is liable to—"

Dick interrupted him sharply:

"We 'll have to risk that. Come, come! you 're wasting time! Get a wagon and somebody to help us. Hurry!"

With dark, dilated eyes, Jean watched the doctor scurry off down the stairs.

"Dick," she said, "the man can't be moved. If you try to lift him, the hemorrhage will start again. You can't carry him down those stairs."

"We 're not going to try," Dick told her curtly. "Evans won't get back in time, anyhow."

"Then why," she cried wonderingly, "did you send the doctor off?"

He glanced at her quickly, abstractedly.

"I did n't want him around. And you must go, too, Jean. I 'll have to handle this thing alone."

"No," said Jean; "I 'll stay."

"You can't!"

"Do you think I'd leave you here alone to face this?" She was pale, trembling a little with fear and excitement; but she gave no sign of shrinking. "Well, I won't. I'm going to stay."

He went to her and caught her by the shoulder.

"Jean, Jean, I beg of you! You don't realize—yo must n't see a thing like this! For my sake—"

"I'm not afraid, Dick; and *I'm going to stay!*" She spoke with a finality that admitted of no further argument. "Now, what's to be done?"

"Done? There's nothing to be done." His hand dropped from her shoulder, as his thoughts swung back into the whirlpool where the doctor's first shout had swept them. As clearly as if he had sat in the Ainsworth library a few hours before and listened to Samuel McAllister's lucid exposition of what would happen in the event of an attempted lynching, he realized what he had to face.

"But you can stop them, can't you, Dick?"

"How? I'll hardly be able to make a show of resistance! That's why I wanted that doctor out of the way."

"You mean—you can't defend him?" Dismayed incredulity held her. "Dick," she whispered, "you —you're not—afraid?"

"Afraid?" he repeated scornfully. "Of what?"

"Then why—why—" Puzzled, shaken, she did

not know how to phrase the question; but Dick answered it for her, even though, so concentrated were his thoughts on the diabolically ingenious scheme spelling ruin for him, he was scarcely conscious of her presence.

"Why, it 's a trap, that 's what it is! The boys were all right this afternoon. They 've been stirred up—talked into this! It 's a trick, a trap; they 've put up a job on me, a dirty, rotten job to do me!" Under the heavy arch of his brows his eyes were blazing; he was beside himself with rage—helpless, impotent rage. "They 've got me right, no matter what I do! Oh, they 're clever, all right! They—"

"But who?" Jean was more bewildered than ever. His outburst brought no enlightenment to her. A trap; a dirty, rotten job; "they" had got him right. The phrases jumbled themselves into a meaningless chaos in her mind. "What are you talking about? Who, Dick?"

"Who? Why—" In the nick of time, he caught himself. Like a douche of cold water there dashed over him the realization that it was Jean Ainsworth to whom he was talking—Jean, the daughter of the man in whose crafty brain had been conceived the appalling dilemma with which he found himself confronted. He made a quick, sweeping gesture with his hand. "Oh, I can't explain now, Jean," he said. "It 's politics."

She recognized the statement for what it was. All her life she had been put off with evasions when she had asked for explanations. From her father she was accustomed to them; but, so far as she knew, this was the first that Dick had ever offered her. And she would have none of it.

"Do you mean to tell me," she began, "that any man, or any number of men, would—"

"I have n't time to tell you anything," he interrupted desperately, "except that I 'm in a hell of a fix!" He swung away from her, half-way to the wide double doors at the end of the corridor and back.

Jean watched the tall, striding figure with anxious fascination. Never before had she seen Dick angry; the strength of his emotion seemed in a breath to have changed him into another man, quite strange to her; strange and rather terrible. She said with an almost pleading deference:

"But I don't understand at all, Dick. Won't you tell me? Won't you explain what is the matter?"

With a supreme effort he pulled himself together, forcing himself to speak quietly.

"Can't you see, Jean? When the boys come up here after Blake, they 'll mean business. If I let them have him, I 'll be branded for the rest of my life—that I broke my oath of office, sullied the honor of the State, and all that rot."

"But you 're not going to let them have him, Dick!"

"If I don't, somebody 's going to get hurt!"

"Oh, Dick! I know; but even if they are—"

He stared at her.

"Why, it 's my own crowd!" he said.

"But if they 're all your friends you can talk to them, can't you?—reason with them."

"Reason with them?" He laughed discordantly. "The only argument they 'll listen to is a gun! They 'll come up here half drunk and wild with excitement; and if I try to stop them, I 'll have to shoot, and shoot to kill! They 'd never think I was serious if I threatened them; they would n't understand. They 'd think I was bluffing to save my face; and then they 'd always believe that I tricked them, that I went back on them. But"—grimly—"I 'm not going back on them!"

"Dick! You—"

He would not let her speak. He plunged on, with edged irony:

"I 'll take my chances with the 'respectable element' of the town! They 're not the ones who get out and vote on election day! My friends, the fellows they call the roughnecks, made me sheriff. They 've stood by me all along, and now I 'll stick to them!"

Jean's breath caught in her throat; an odd wave

of faintness surged over her. She moved uncertainly toward the broad, uncurtained window that overlooked the street, and, lifting the sash, leaned for a moment on the sill to steady herself. The cool night air brushed the dizziness from her brain, cleared to some extent the obscuring mental fog.

Directly in front of the lawn that stretched before the hospital was a small elongated square, formed by the intersection of three streets, and thickly bordered with trees and shrubbery. In the middle of it was a single sputtering arc-lamp that spread a small circle of dim, fluctuating light to the center of the square and left the edges in deep shadow.

A faint, creaking sound set Jean's taut nerves aquiver; she stared anxiously out into the night, hoping, praying with an agony of supplication that Doctor Evans might have been successful in his mission; but the sound died away in the distance and silence descended—that heavy, sinister silence that had oppressed her before, and now filled her with shivering dread. A little throbbing pulse beat in her throat, chokingly. To her overwrought senses it seemed that the dusky shadows on the lawn beneath the trees were alive with vague, intangible forms, flitting this way and that, dodging from tree trunk to tree trunk. She could not see distinctly, but—surely that was not the wind stir-

ring the shrubbery? There in the darkness, at the left of the path—was it—was n't it—a knot of dim figures?

Behind her she heard the steady thud, thud of Dick's heels as he paced up and down the length of the corridor. She turned from the window, holding her voice steady.

"Then you 're not even going to try to stop them?" she asked. "You won't even try?"

"No!" He snapped out the monosyllable explosively. "I've nothing to gain and everything to lose! Let them have him. It 's the best way out of it."

Her hands were clasped together to quiet their trembling. Her eyes—dark troubled pools in the pale oval of her face—were fearful, beseeching.

"Oh, Dick," she said, "how can you? How can you talk about the best way out for yourself when a man's life is at stake?"

"A man? You call that beast in there a man? He deserves all he 'll get; and he 'll be hanged, anyway, in a couple of months. He 's the last thing to be considered. He 's nothing but a dirty, cowardly murderer who—"

"No matter what he is or what he 's done, he 's entitled to a trial!" she interrupted. "But that is n't the point. He 's in your charge, and you 've sworn to protect him!"

"I did n't swear to play into the hands of the men who put up this job on me!" he retorted grimly. "I 'm going to act as I think best, not as they 'd like to have me!"

"I don't know what you 're talking about, but I do know that it has nothing to do with this. You 're the sheriff!" She took a step forward, and hurled the words at him. "You 've got to stop those men!"

"What?" he demanded harshly. "Ruin my career, smash my future, shoot down my friends, and all for the sake of a filthy murderer?"

"Not for him, no! For yourself!"

"For me?"—with fierce sarcasm.

"Yes, for you!" She was as fierce now as he. She was trembling no longer. A hot color burned in her cheeks; her eyes were flaming coals. White wrath, a bitter, incredulous scorn, barbed her tongue. "Have you no honor, no self-respect? You took an oath to uphold law and order. You 're not even making an attempt to keep it!"

He jerked his head in a gesture of exasperated impotence.

"Oh, Jean, can't you see that 's all theory? We 're facing facts now!"

"Yes, we 're facing facts now!" she shot back at him tensely. "The fact of whether you 're going to act like a man or a coward! What did you

promise me a few minutes ago when you told me you loved me? That you were going to stand on your feet like a man and face the issue, no matter what it might be! And you 've failed at the first test!"

"You don't understand—"

"I understand that right and wrong are squarely before you, and you 're choosing the wrong!" She seemed fairly to tower as she stood there, straight and slender, her lithe young figure drawn up to its full height, her head flung back so that her great eyes blazed into his. Tingling, on fire to her very finger-tips, she was the embodied spirit of strength, of pride, of fierce, indomitable courage; she was primitive womanhood embattled, fighting with all the weapons at her command for the honor of the man she loved.

To Dick Leighton there was something almost tragic in the passionate beauty of her; it gripped him irresistibly, even while the futility of making her understand rendered his plea almost despairing.

"Jean, listen. You don't know what you 're asking. It is n't just now, just to-night. You want me to throw away everything I 've accomplished in the past, tear down all I 've built up, utterly spoil every chance for my future—our future—"

"I 'd rather marry a *man* with a past than a coward with a future!"

"You 're not just, Jean; you 're not fair to me! These men you 're telling me to shoot down—they 're my friends! They trust me—*trust* me, do you hear? And I'll not betray them."

She did not give an inch.

"There's just one right way, and you 've got to take it!" she cried. "Your duty is clear. Do it!"

"Duty be damned!" His self-control snapped like an overstrained cord; he swung his arm with a gesture of savage impatience. "Jean, I 've—" He stopped abruptly; his arm dropped to his side. "They 're here," he said.

XVII

FOR an instant Jean could hear nothing. Then she became aware of a low, confused murmur. The open space about the arc-lamp was filled with a mass of men, jostling this way and that. A single voice shrilled out. The black mass undulated, swayed; then, as a dense cloud of murky smoke is vomited from the mouth of a cannon, it poured over the lawn and into the building.

Shuddering, sick, Jean shrank back from the window. Her lips moved, formed Dick's name, but she did not utter it. He stood in the doorway of Blake's room, his whole body rigid, his hands clenched into fists. Then, with a bound, he was across the corridor; the double doors slammed shut. Where reason and argument had failed, instinct rose irresistibly and took command.

"Get into that room!" he ordered, over his shoulder, while he jammed the bolts into place. "Quick!"

She found her voice.

"Dick! Dick! what are you going to do?"

"I'm not going to let them take that man!" He had to shout his answer, above the uproar on the

stairs. The whole building seemed to shake to the rush of trampling feet.

"Oh!" breathed Jean. "Oh!"

A smothered cry came from the prisoner's room.

"He 's awake now, all right!" Dick muttered grimly. "He knows what they 're after!"

Some one seized the door-handle and rattled it violently, shouting: "Open up, there! Open up!" A blow smashed against the panels—another and another; and with every shock the furious voices rose to a roar.

"Get into that room, I tell you!" Dick ordered Jean again. "Hurry!"

She did not move. For the first time fear for his personal safety gripped her.

"Oh, Dick, you 'll be hurt!" she gasped. "They 'll kill you!"

Without another word he leaped toward her, caught her arm, and swept her into the prisoner's room. On the threshold he wheeled, with drawn revolver.

And now the blows rained fast and furious on the doors. They strained, groaned, shivered—and flew open with a crash. The aperture was choked with men, men whose faces, only partly visible beneath rude masks of cloth, or knotted handkerchiefs, were distorted with rage and hate and the lust of blood.

"Stop!" Dick's voice rang out harshly, like the warning clang of an alarm bell. "What do you want?"

"We want him!" came the answer in a gruff chorus, to which an agonized shriek from the prisoner's room made a hideous obligato.

"Well, you can't have him!" Dick's eyes, hard and penetrating, darted from one to another of the crowd; but the grotesque masks made an effectual disguise for every face. "You can't have him!" he repeated.

"The hell we can't!" growled a deep voice. "Don't you make no trouble, Dick; you're all right, but we want that cuss an' we're goin' to have him!"

There was a yell of approval; but Dick shook his head.

"Hold on, boys," he said sternly. "You're going too fast. You just listen to me for a minute."

"We'll listen to nothin'!" rumbled a tall man with a slouch hat pulled down over his forehead. "We mean business!"

"So do I! The first man that starts anything is going to get hurt! *That goes!* There isn't going to be any lynching to-night!"

Some one laughed out excitedly; the crowd shifted, jostled.

"Cut the comedy, Dick!" advised the tall man. "We 're all friends here."

"Friends?" Dick caught up his cue. "Friends? A fine lot of friends you are! Can't you see this is a dirty job to do me?" He was crouching a little, his head thrust forward between his hunched shoulders. The round black barrel of his revolver, pointing straight into the crowd, never wavered. "Well, it 's not going through! I mean it! Now clear out before somebody gets hurt!"

Again the crowd shifted, but this time uneasily. A murmur rose.

"Aw, he 's only stalling, fellows!" A man in the outer corridor began to push his way forward. "Don't let him bluff you! Go on!"

"Stop!" There was no indecision, no wavering of purpose in that voice. Here was no longer Dick Leighton, politician, plausible casuist, anxious to win and hold the favor of the men before him, but Dick Leighton, sheriff of the county, keeping his sworn oath to protect the prisoner in his charge. With the issue squarely before him he faced it instinctively and unflinchingly. He did not speak loudly, but there was fearlessness and power in every note of his level voice.

"This is a put-up job, boys," he went on, "and you've been tricked into it. Who talked you

into this? Who 's going to profit by it? I 'll tell you! It 's—"

"You liar!" The hesitating group in the doorway was thrust aside; a roughly dressed man leaped forward, brandishing a revolver. "Come on, boys!" he yelled; and leaped straight at Dick.

The sheriff fired. In the cloud of acrid smoke that swirled from the barrel of the revolver the man spun slowly around, fell to his knees, and then collapsed in a crumpled heap.

For a breath there was silence, thick, suffocating silence, pregnant with awful possibilities. Across it flashed Jean Ainsworth's white-clad figure.

"Stop—oh, stop!" Her hands, red-stained, were outstretched; her face was gray with terror. "It 's no use! Blake is dead!"

Silence again, broken only by the hissing indrawn breath of the crowd. Then the tall man stooped over the huddled figure on the floor, fumbling with the gaudy handkerchief that concealed the face.

"Well, then, Leighton," he said, "you 've done a hell of a fine job for nothin'!"

The handkerchief fell at Dick's feet.

"*Christ!*" he whispered.

Jean stumbled to her knees beside the body of her brother. She lifted his head; it lolled limply back across her arm. There was no pulse-beat in

the loose wrist, no flutter of breath between the lips.

On the floor a slow stain spread and widened.

David Ainsworth had lost his most dependable worker. Tommy would carry no more news from Jackson's place to the study in the big house on the hill.

XVIII

MARY NESTOR set the coffee-tray on a little table in the hall outside Jean's room and tiptoed downstairs again. She opened the door of the library and went in, walking very softly, as if some one were asleep whom she feared to waken. No one was asleep in that house; she herself had not closed her eyes all night. But the stillness, the heavy, oppressive stillness that broods under the shadow of the wings of death, had invaded every room, muffled every footstep, every spoken word. A chill rain beat against the window-panes; the closely drawn curtains swayed a little in the draft that breathed through the cracks. On the hearth the charred logs lay blackened and cold, among the ashes. In the wan, wet light that filtered through the storm-splashed panes the furniture loomed strange and oddly different, taking on dubious shapes, like the furniture of a familiar room seen in a dream.

It was all like a dream, indeed—a phantasmagoria of impossible horrors. Mary Nestor's harassed brain could not weld the details of the night's happenings into a unified whole. There was

only a series of pictures, a throng of jumbled impressions, set in motion by the vague telephone message of an "accident" at the hospital, and momentarily becoming more confused and terrible—: the bare, white-walled room, the crowd of curious faces, queerly distorted in the uncertain light; the still, motionless form on the floor; Jean, stricken, disheveled, her white gown streaked and stained, her eyes dry pools of despair; Dick Leighton's pale face, set and awful in its dumb horror.

And through it all, like some gaunt spirit recurring in the dream, stalked the figure of David Ainsworth, silent, spectre-like. Mary Nestor shuddered away from the memory of the look that had come into his face when he bent over the body of his son. But there was no trace of that look when he came to the doorway of the library; his voice held its customary ring of curt authority.

"We 'll have some lights, please, Mary," he said, and pushed the electric wall button. "Did you telephone for McAllister again?"

"Yes. He was n't there. His assistant said they would try to find him, but he had left the house early, and he had n't come to the office."

The Congressman walked over to the fireplace and stood looking down at the heap of strewn ashes, his hands clasped behind him. He was frowning.

"It 's outrageous, his taking himself off in this

fashion!" he said, more to himself than to his sister-in-law. "He must know that I need him! He ought to have come without being sent for!" His fingers twitched. "Did you impress it on them at 'The Register' office that I must see him without delay, Mary?"

"Yes." Mary Nestor knew that the brief affirmative was all that he required or desired from her; it was not her part to comment or question. But she could not help feeling that his apparent interest in everyday matters, his persistent attempts to reach Samuel McAllister—a man, who, no matter what his business connections, had never been a close friend of the family—showed a callousness, a lack of consideration for the ordinary proprieties that was almost indecent. She asked gravely: "But, David, at such a time, is it necessary?"

He made a gesture of impatience.

"My dear Mary, of course it is necessary," he said, without turning. "I should hardly make a point of it if it were not. I'll give him another half-hour. Have you talked to Jean this morning?"

"Just a word. I took some coffee up to her a few minutes ago. She said she'd be down in a little while."

"Then you haven't questioned her?"

Miss Nestor shook her head.

"No; I felt that she was n't in any condition to be questioned. I 've heard her stirring about in her room all night. Poor child! poor child! what a terrible experience for her!"

The tears started afresh; Miss Nestor tried to blink them back, and turned her head away, so that her brother-in-law should not see. He had always hated tears, holding that they were a sign not only of weakness, but of mere surface emotion; and her grief for Tommy was anything but superficial. Much as the boy had tried her, severely as she had at times disapproved of and censured him, he had been very dear to her; she had loved him almost as much as if she had actually been the mother whose place she had so sincerely striven to take.

"Oh, David!" she burst out suddenly, "if only Tommy had stayed at home last night, this would n't have happened! He was so excitable, so easily led. I 've been so afraid he 'd get into some trouble. They 're always drinking and fighting downtown there. If only we 'd kept him home!"

"Mary, this can do no good," Ainsworth began.

"No; nothing can do any good now. It 's too late. But if you 'd only listened to me, David—"

He wheeled quickly.

"What do you mean?"

"You know, I 've asked you again and again not to let Tommy go over there, and you not only let him, you encouraged him. I pleaded with you to keep him home more, and you made light of everything I said. You were so sure he was all right; but he was only a boy, and all the things he saw and heard in those low saloons were leaving their marks on him." All the restraining barriers built up by years of repression were swept away in the tumultuous flood of her grief. She rushed on, deaf to Ainsworth's smothered protest, blind to the gray pallor that had settled on his face:.

"He was n't the same. He was n't my dear, lovable Tommy. I was so worried! I did n't know from day to day—oh, this is what I feared would come, some terrible thing—"

"You 're talking wildly, Mary," he interrupted her hoarsely. "The boy was all right, I tell you! He was doing good work for me."

"Yes, but I warned you, David, about the influences—the associates. What were they doing last night? Trying to commit murder! And Tommy—why, it may even have been that he was there on your account, and got swept away by the excitement before he realized what he was doing!"

"Silence!" In one stride Ainsworth was beside her. "How dare you say such things? You don't know what you 're talking about!"

"I feared it—oh, I feared it!" She beat her hands distractedly together. "And now it's brought him to his death—such a death—"

He seized her violently by the shoulders, thrusting his face, convulsed and haggard, within an inch of hers; there were streaks of blood across the balls of his eyes.

"Silence, I tell you! Do you want Jean to hear you? Be still, woman!"

The reference to Jean did more to check her outburst than his violence. She tottered to a chair and sank weakly into it, covering her eyes with her hands. He stood glaring down at her, his shoulders heaving with his stertorous breathing, his fingers opening and shutting jerkily, claw-like. It was a full moment before he could command his voice at all; when he did speak again, it was in a labored, unnatural fashion.

"There was no question of murder involved, none at all. Blake was a criminal, of the lowest, vilest type, who deserved no more consideration than a mad dog. He would have hanged inevitably in a few weeks."

Miss Nestor managed to control her sobs, but the tears still coursed down her cheeks as she lifted her face.

"Even so, David, it was wrong."

"Not necessarily." Outwardly, at least, David

Ainsworth was himself again. He went over to the fireplace and stationed himself with his back to it. "Not necessarily, at all. Looking at it from a rational point of view, untinged by any sentimentalism, the community would have been bettered by the death of a scoundrel, and an example of prompt justice would have been shown that would have a restraining effect on others of his kind."

"But, David," protested Miss Nestor in amazement, "that 's mob-law! It 's directly opposed to everything you 've always stood for! It 's not right. You can't mean you think it 's right, or that Tommy could have thought so? Oh, he never did, David! It was wrong, absolutely wrong! Blake would have been executed; he was n't going to escape justice. But they could n't wait; they wanted to take the law into their own hands. They have no regard for it; they never have had. They 're always drinking and shooting and killing one another downtown there. Until this past year there was some sort of fight almost every night. Most of the disorder has been stopped by Mr. Leighton; but—"

"Leighton!" At the name the dark blood whipped into Ainsworth's cheeks.

"Yes. He 's done more than any one else has ever been able to; he 's had more influence. But even he can't control their evil and lawlessness alto-

gether. And then—last night—oh, the poor boy! How must he have felt when he found out who it was he had shot!"

"When he found out?" sneered the Congressman. "He knew well enough who it was! That 's why he did it—damn him!"

"My God!" White-lipped, appalled, she started to her feet, drawing away from him as if he had struck her. "David, how can you say such a thing? He did n't know who it was, and he had to shoot. He did n't know Tommy was there."

"He did, or he never would have fired! Do you suppose he 'd have shot one of his own crowd and queered his chances of election? Not he! But when he recognized Tommy, he saw an opportunity to make a parade of his courage, to uphold the law! Know who it was?" He laughed bitterly, sardonically. "Of course he knew!"

"But—but it 's impossible, David!" she protested, in blank incredulity. "Why, he—he *liked* Tommy; he told me so. And he—oh, it 's too utterly insane! Dick Leighton? He would n't hurt any one, if he could help it, not even his worst enemy. I 've known him all his life. And what could he possibly gain by it in the election? Every one wants him for sheriff—"

"Sheriff? He 's not going to run for sheriff! He 's after my seat in Congress." Ainsworth took

a step forward; his jaw quivered under the tension of the tight-drawn muscles. "He 's been scheming and working for months. I 've only just found out how he 's been steadily undermining me."

"It 's impossible!" she gasped.

"No chicanery is impossible in politics. Leighton wants to go to Congress in my place—*my* place, I tell you!"—he struck the table in front of him a crashing blow with his fist—"the place I have held for years, that I have made rightfully my own by faithful service, and that should be mine as long as I live! He means to have it! He 's left no stone unturned to rob me of it. He did n't even stop at taking the life of my son!"

"Oh, David, David! I can't believe it!"

Nor did it seem even remotely credible. Dick Leighton, the frank, straightforward boy of whom she had been so fond, the boy whom Gordon Randolph had loved as a son? Impossible!

"It 's true!" said Ainsworth; and conviction swept over her icily. "Cory Jackson, Murray, that scurrilous sheet they print over there—they 're all behind him. It 's a systematic effort. But all this is a waste of time. I 've got to see McAllister I don't know what the man 's thinking about not to be here!"

Miss Nestor sat down—collapsed, rather—in her chair, and closed her eyes. The horror of the night

before, that nightmare horror, was upon her again, in all its fantastic hideousness. Was there to be no end to it? First Tommy and now—Jean. She shivered as if with cold.

"David, this will kill Jean. After the shock of Tommy's death, to learn that Dick Leighton—" Somehow, she could not finish; the words "murdered him," simply would not come. She kept saying inwardly that she did not believe it; it was impossible. And yet—it had happened.

Plastic, submissive, she had not lived for many years in close association with David Ainsworth without being mentally dominated by him. The opinions she held could not be said to have been colored by his; in all essentials, and with the exception of a few trivial modifications, inevitably the result of her gentle, kindly nature, they were his. He dictated them in effect as he dictated the policy of "The Register," and they became her views after a metamorphosis no more extensive than that which sufficed to transform a statement by David Ainsworth into an editorial by Samuel McAllister.

Probably but twice in her life had she adopted a definite view-point of her own, or dared to formulate it: when she had upheld Jean's determination to leave Randolph, and when she had taken issue with her brother-in-law in regard to Tommy's associates and habits. In those two

instances alone, perhaps because the principles involved vitally stirred the mother love within her and quickened her protective instinct, she had risen superior to mere assertion, and had unerringly detected the sophistry in arguments that would ordinarily have seemed unanswerable; in those two alone.

She had never questioned David Ainsworth's right indefinitely to continue in the office of Congressman, any more than he himself had questioned it. That he was a public servant and, as such, subject to the will of the people, to be retained in or removed from office according to their dictum, was a proposition to which she had given no attention whatever. The place was his; it belonged to him. His right to it was inalienable. An attack on that right, then, an attempt to deprive him of it, was as unprincipled as it was treacherous and dastardly. The man who could conceive it and carry it out would scarcely stop at anything.

And Jean loved him, believed in him!

"Oh, David," said Mary Nestor, "she must never know—never!"

He shook his head.

"She 'll have to know, Mary, and the sooner the better for her. It 's for her own good. I shall tell her at once. Do you say to her, please, that I should like to speak with her."

"But—"

"At once, if you please! You 're wasting time, and time is precious just now. Damn McAllister!" he rasped out sharply. "Why is n't he here? I need him!—Mary, call Jean immediately!"

"You 'll be careful, David? Remember, she 's—"

"Yes, yes! Go and get her, please!" He impatiently waved her to the door. As she dragged her unwilling feet up the stairs, she heard him at the telephone, his voice hard, curt, commanding:

"This is Ainsworth talking. Where 's McAllister? . . . Well, find him! . . . I don't care; *find* him, I say!"

XIX

TO a man less hag-ridden than was David Ainsworth, the wanton cruelty of cross-examining a woman on the verge of collapse would have been obvious. Shock and exhaustion had hollowed Jean's eyes, painting dark circles under their sockets and etching a sharply defined line of white about the tender mouth. She was listless, languid, as if all the vitality and resiliency of youth had gone out of her. Mary Nestor, hovering anxiously in the background, cast a glance of urgent appeal at the Congressman. He nodded briefly, and went to Jean's side.

"I 'm sorry I had to send for you, daughter," he said, as he took her hand and bent to touch his lips to her forehead. "I know how unstrung you feel, and I hate to trouble you with questions about last night, but I must."

"I told you all there is to tell, Father." She sat down in the chair he placed for her, leaning her head wearily back against the cushions.

"Not in detail, Jean. You did n't even explain how it was that you came to be at the hospital in the first place. What prompted you to go there?"

"I did n't intend to go when I started out. I felt restless, and I went for a walk. Then, when I got over by the hospital, I remembered that Dick was there, and I went in to see him."

"After what I said to you before dinner yesterday?" Ainsworth hitched his own chair a little closer to hers. "Had you forgotten that, Jean?"

"No. But I wanted to talk to him. He was n't there, but Doctor Evans was. And then the nurse insisted on leaving, and I told the doctor I 'd take her place. So I stayed."

"I see. Then you were tnere some time. With whom?"

"Why, just Doctor Evans and Dick. Bill Murray was there for a while, but he went home to get his supper."

"Then you three were alone in the building with the prisoner when the mob came?"

She shook her head.

"No; only Dick and I. Dick sent Doctor Evans after help."

"Help for what?"

"To get Blake away. A wagon or something. He was unconscious."

"Ah, yes," nodded Ainsworth. "But what made you think that it was advisable to move him?"

Jean brushed her hand across her eyes. So much had happened since then; it was so hard to remem-

ber; and she was very tired. Her head ached and swam dizzily. She wished that her father would not make her answer all these questions; she was so very tired. She said slowly, striving to recall the scene aright:

"Why, some one told Doctor Evans that they were going to lynch Blake. He rushed upstairs and told us; and Dick sent him right out after help."

"Some one told Doctor Evans, you say? Who?"

"I don't remember the name, but it was some one he knew."

"Ah!" Ainsworth leaned forward imperceptibly in his chair; his narrowed eyes were fixed on the girl's face. "A rather extraordinary proceeding, was it not, for the mob to send a messenger to warn the sheriff?"

"Oh, but the man was a friend of Dick's," Jean said, with something more nearly approaching animation than she had yet shown. "He said so."

"Indeed!" observed Ainsworth, dryly. "Then the doctor did n't get back in time, and you and Leighton were there alone?"

"Yes, Father." She relapsed into her attitude of apathetic lassitude, her hand shielding her half-closed eyes from the light. She answered his queries obediently, submissively following the leads that he gave her, without in the least realizing his object. She did not know why he was questioning her so

closely; she was for the time being incapable of analysis. Her sole wish was to be left alone, in such peace as she might find in the quiet of her own room. "I am so tired, Father," she murmured. "May n't I go upstairs now?"

Miss Nestor started forward impulsively, but Ainsworth stopped her with a peremptory gesture.

"In just a moment. There are one or two more things— What was Mr. Leighton's attitude when he realized what was about to happen?"

"Why—why—" she hesitated a little—"he was very angry at first. He wanted to get Blake out, but there was n't time, and he did n't know quite what to do."

"What did he say?"

"He said that if he defended Blake, some one was sure to get hurt; and he did n't want to shoot his friends."

"No; of course not!"

She did not sense the irony in her father's remark.

"He said Blake was n't worth it."

"Quite so. Blake was n't worth defending, at the risk of hurting some good friend of his. Is that right?"

"Yes, Father."

"Then—" the Congressman's fingers clutched the arms of his chair—"then he made no preparations to resist?"

"Not at first." She was quite unconscious that this was the admission into which her father had been carefully and shrewdly drawing her. "When we heard the men running through the building, he locked the corridor doors."

"Ah! Then he had decided not to interfere with his friends, who had thoughtfully notified him in advance of their intentions, until the mob broke in and —*he recognized Tommy!*" Brutally plain, the accusation burst from his lips. His face was suffused, and the veins on his temples were thick and congested.

Miss Nestor gave a frightened cry and started forward again.

"Oh, David—take care!" She ran to Jean, who looked up with a little puzzled frown.

"Recognized Tommy?" she repeated vaguely. It was clear that she did not understand the significance of her father's words.

"He would n't shoot one of his own friends, but he did n't hesitate to kill the boy whose death would work no injury to him!"

For a moment Jean stared at him, blankly, uncomprehendingly. Then, as his meaning was slowly borne in upon her and she realized the enormity of the charge, her face blanched; sheer horror gripped her.

"No! No!" she cried out. "He did n't know!

They were all masked. He could n't tell one from another!"

"He could and did! If he had n't, he never would have fired!"

"No! No!" She struck her clenched hands together in frantic denial. Speech poured from her lips in an incoherent flood. "He did n't know it was Tommy! No one dreamed that Tommy was there. He had to fire to stop them; they were rushing at him! He did n't know *who* they were; he could n't tell! He thought they were all his friends! He did! I know he did! That 's why he said he would n't shoot when I told him he had to defend Blake! He did n't know! He—"

"*You* told him? Why? What for?"

She tried to answer and could not. Her breath came in labored gasps; she was holding hysteria at bay by sheer force of will.

"Why did you tell him that?" demanded Ainsworth fiercely. "Answer me!"

"Because—" she faltered, choked, then plunged on blindly—"because I did n't want the man I love to betray his trust, to fail—"

"The man you love!"

"I 'd promised to marry him; it was only last night, before—before—it all happened. I love him —I—"

"Oh, Jean!" moaned Miss Nestor. "Oh, my poor dear child!"

"I warned you!" Ainsworth rasped harshly. "I told you he was n't fit for you to know! He 's a vile, unprincipled scoundrel, a treacherous hound—"

"But it 's not true! It 's not true!"

"It 's true that he murdered your brother!"

"No! No!" Her voice rose shrilly. "He did n't! He did n't! He was only trying to do what was right! It 's a lie, I tell you! it 's a lie!" She was swaying back and forth, her body rigid, stiff from head to foot. Her eyes rolled convulsively.

Ainsworth was a little frightened at the wildness of her appearance. The fury of his paroxysm passed; he mastered his rage with a supreme effort.

"Jean, you must be mad! You 're beside yourself," he said sternly. "We 'll let this matter rest until you are in a condition to think and reason clearly. But one thing you must understand: you are through with Leighton. You are my daughter, and I *order* you to obey me!"

"Oh, Father—"

He interrupted her brusquely.

"I 'm not going to argue with you, Jean. I have other and more urgent matters to attend to. When you are yourself, we will go into it again. But understand me: you are to have nothing further to do

with this man. I forbid it!" He turned and went out of the room. A moment later the slam of the front door attested to the fact that he had left the house.

XX

JEAN AINSWORTH was not of the clinging type of woman. Clear-headed, sturdy, well poised, self-reliant, she had created favorable notice and comment among her associates in New York. She had borne herself splendidly, meeting more than one crisis with a clear-headedness worthy of an older and far more experienced woman. Her hand was always sure, her nerves steady. She made no costly mistakes. "Let me have Miss Ainsworth, please," had been a sort of set formula adopted by the hospital surgeons whenever they had an especially difficult or complicated case. They would not have recognized her in the distraught girl who clung to Mary Nestor as a frightened child clings to its mother. She permitted her aunt to lead her upstairs to her room; but she would not lie down; she would not rest.

"Oh, Auntie, what shall I do? What shall I do?" she moaned, over and over. "Father 's so bitter, he 's so unjust, so terribly unjust! I don't know what to do, Auntie; it 's all so ghastly."

"There, there, dear," crooned Miss Nestor, stroking the girl's tumbled hair. "Don't cry so. It

will be all right. You know how your father loved Tommy. The poor boy's death has been a frightful shock to him. It 's only natural that he should be bitter and resentful."

"But can't he understand? How could he accuse Dick of such an awful thing? How could such a thought even enter his mind? Why, Dick was absolutely horror-stricken when he saw who it was! And Father—"

"There, there, dear," her aunt interposed soothingly. "Wait until you 're calmer. We 've all been so upset that everything is distorted. It will all come out right."

"I tell you, Auntie, Dick *could n't* have known Tommy!" Jean persisted excitedly. "He was behind two or three others. I came out of Blake's room just as he pushed them aside and burst through, and *I* did n't recognize him—my own brother. His face was covered up with a handkerchief and he had an old slouch hat pulled down over his forehead. His clothes were rough, too, much too big for him. They were n't at all like the ones he had on yesterday afternoon. They were working-men's clothes. He looked like a laborer of the commonest sort, not in the least like himself. You saw him, Aunt Mary; you would n't have known him if his face had been covered up, would you?"

"Now, Jean, don't try to talk about it any more.

You 're all worked up, and overwrought. Just try to rest, won't you?"

The poor lady was at her wits' end; torn between her affection and pity for Jean and her perfectly natural desire that the girl should realize how utterly base was the man to whom she had given her love. But Jean was not to be soothed into silence or diverted from the subject. She went on, speaking rapidly, feverishly:

"I don't understand how Tommy came to be with those men, anyway. They were n't his friends; they looked like mill-hands—the rough ones that are always making trouble. They must have come from downtown. I don't see how Tommy came to be with them at all."

"Perhaps he was working downtown," suggested Miss Nestor, unguardedly. "Somebody may have made a speech that influenced him."

"Working—downtown?"

"Yes. He knew a number of the men there. Every one was so horrified at poor Norah Foster's death, it 's quite possible that Tommy—"

"I don't understand, Aunt Mary," Jean interrupted. "You said Tommy might have been *working* downtown. What kind of work?"

"Why, I don't know exactly. Something to do with politics. David told me he was very helpful. He was over there a good deal."

"Helpful? To whom?"

"Why, to your father, of course. I really know nothing about it, except that he used to go around to the different places and get information."

"But was n't there any way you could keep him home, or at least on this side of the creek?"

Miss Nestor answered the question with another:

"*I* keep him home, Jean, when your father was willing that he should go, and praised him for what he did?"

"I see," Jean said gravely. She meant, of course, that she understood how her aunt was powerless to interfere in any matter on which David Ainsworth had set the seal of his approval; what she did not see was how her father could have allowed Tommy, impulsive, impressionable, weak of will, to be exposed to influences that might easily have affected for the worse a far stronger character. He had not lacked initiative, but he had never had a sense of proportion. His mind was chameleon-like, assuming the coloration reflected from the opinions of the last speaker. To Jean there seemed something cruel in David Ainsworth's blindness to those characteristics that had been obvious to her ever since Tommy's childhood. "You could n't do anything, Aunt Mary?"

"I did my best, Jean, indeed I did! I thought it could n't be good for Tommy to go downtown so

much, and I said so, more than once. But David seemed to think it was all right. He said it was nonsense—my idea that Tommy was being coarsened and spoiled; there was no use arguing with him."

"No," Jean agreed; "there never was, Aunt Mary. And so that 's how Tommy came to be there!" She could see it all, now: some hot-head passionately declaiming against Blake, working up the crowd to a pitch of blind fury; and Tommy, excitable, as easily swayed by his emotions as a leaf in a gale, caught up and carried beyond all control, reason, and sanity, a futile human drop in a tidal wave of primitive barbarism.

She did not, could not, blame Tommy. As well hold culpable the tinder that ignites at the touch of a lighted match.

A timid knock sounded at the door.

"What is it?" Jean asked.

Kitty's voice answered her:

"Oh, it 's Mr. Leighton, ma'am, and he wants to see Mr. Ainsworth."

Miss Nestor was visibly startled.

"Mr. Ainsworth is n't at home, Kitty," she called out quickly. "Tell him—"

Jean raised her hand.

"Ask Mr. Leighton to wait, please, Kitty; I 'll see him."

"But, Jean," Miss Nestor remonstrated, as the maid retreated downstairs, "you must n't. You 're not well enough to see any one."

"I 'm all right, Auntie."

"You 'll only upset yourself again. And your father—you know what he said—"

"Yes, I know; but he did n't mean it. He was n't responsible. No man in his right senses would have talked as he did. He 'll probably be angry with me, but I can't help that. I 'm not a child any longer."

Miss Nestor rose in agitation. Jean might believe that her father's bitterness and rage were but temporary emotions; she, Mary Nestor, knew better. If ever implacable hate had burned in a man's brain, it had blazed out from the eyes of David Ainsworth when he had uttered his denunciation of Dick Leighton.

"Oh, Jean, Jean, you don't know what you 're doing!" wailed Miss Nestor, wringing her hands. "You don't realize how your father feels. If you disobey him in this—"

Jean interrupted her.

"I am going down to see Dick, Auntie, no matter what happens. I must."

"Then I 'll go down with you. You are n't well and you must n't excite yourself." It was the old instinct of protection at work, the mother instinct,

the desire to shield the young, at no matter what cost to herself. Mary Nestor had always been afraid of her brother-in-law. Without knowing it she had lived for years in daily, hourly fear of him. To incur his displeasure was something to be regarded with dread; the mere thought of his anger filled her with a feeling akin to panic. But Jean quietly put away the pleading hands that would have detained her.

"Aunt Mary, I don't want to hurt your feelings, but will you please not try to interfere? You need not worry about me; I shall be perfectly all right. But—I prefer to talk to Dick alone."

It was no use. With impotent tears streaming down her cheeks, Mary Nestor went slowly out of the room.

XXI

THE average small town belongs to the family *Felidæ* and is of the typical genus *Felis*. Its characteristics are those of the common house cat. Watchfully suspicious under the appearance of aloof indolence, it moves stealthily, with padded tread. Its claws are smoothly sheathed; its short, pointed jaws do not show their power. Under the caress of flattery it purrs. It fawns at the feet of the recognized master and rubs itself against his legs, even while it keeps a careful eye on him, lest he strike first. For the small town is distrustful of every one; and he who is up to-day may be down to-morrow, within reach of claws and jaws that are alike sharp and merciless. It is incapable of forbearance, of pity, mercy, or forgiveness. It is ruthless in its judgments, implacable in its resentments. Its vengeance is a thing to be dreaded by him who cannot flee it.

With nothing in particular over which to be consequential, it is enormously, incredibly conceited. It imagines itself to be a very great number of things that it is not. It struts. And woe may well betide the man who offends it. But the man who

wounds its vanity and belittles it in the eyes of the world about, is given short shrift indeed. With all the sinuous strength of its animal prototype it strikes; it seldom misses.

Although he had been born and brought up in Randolph, Dick Leighton did not possess the small-town mind; but he knew it and he knew what to expect from it. For the abortive attempt at lynching the criminal Cass Blake a sacrifice would be exacted.

Popular sentiment seemed inclined to accept Tommy Ainsworth. Would it demand others? Just how greatly outraged did Randolph consider itself?

Had the lynching been successful the town could have climbed back to its proper eminence only by the path of "rigid investigation," that would amount to nothing but that would enable it to hold up its head again and declare its escutcheon cleansed of blot and stain.

But there had been no lynching. There had been merely the threat of one by a mob, the body of whose recognized leader lay on a sheeted cot at the Ainsworth Hospital. Tommy had paid in full for the indignity he had offered the community. It seemed probable that his payment would be accepted in total discharge of the debt of the others

as well, and the account marked closed—as far as Randolph as a whole was concerned.

But what of David Ainsworth? What of his responsibility, tacit and active? Those were the questions that hammered at Dick Leighton's brain, and kept him tramping up and down the floor of his bedroom through the long black hours before the dawn and through the dull gray of the morning that followed the ghastly termination of the scene at the hospital.

Twice Miriam had peered cautiously in through a crack in the door, watching the tall figure that paced the distance between the four-poster and the shaving-stand, exactly as Gordon Randolph had been wont to pace it. Once she had spoken to him, as she had often spoken to the Judge when he failed to appear below-stairs at half-past seven.

"Your breakfast 's gettin' cold," she said, severely matter-of-fact.

"Never mind it." He did not even turn his head, and she tiptoed away, nodding. Except for the brown hair and the material of the coat—Mr. Dick never wore alpaca—he might have been the Judge threshing out some knotty problem. Seven paces to the foot of the four-poster; seven paces back to the shaving-stand . . .

What of David Ainsworth?

Legal proof of the Congressman's complicity

would not be necessary to damn him in the eyes of his fellow townspeople. Enough if they believed in his complaisant foreknowlege of Tommy's act. He would forfeit their friendship, their support, their confidence and respect. He would no longer be Randolph's great man; he would be a pariah. Shame would be cried upon him, the finger of scorn pointed at him. He would be held up to public contempt and revilement, until he betook himself to some place where a decent oblivion could descend on him and his.

Yet Randolph might forever remain in ignorance of the fact that Tommy Ainsworth had in reality been a puppet moved by his father's hand, and Randolph would be well content as long as it remained unaware that it was being kept in the dark. It would censure Tommy, sympathize with his father, and send Dick Leighton to Congress.

Then *why tell what he knew?*

Seven paces to the foot of the four-poster, on which the carefully smoothed pillows bore plump witness that no head had pressed them the night before; seven paces back to the shaving-stand, where the oval mirror showed the reflection of a face stamped with sudden lines of trouble and anxiety. Seven paces to the foot of the four-poster . . .

Why not let the matter rest where it was? To reveal his knowledge would do him little if any

good. True, it would put an end to the power and prestige of David Ainsworth, definitely settle the nomination; but would it not be equally likely to put an end to something which to Dick Leighton meant more than anything else in the world—his hope of marriage to Jean Ainsworth? The death of Tommy, tragic and terrible though it had been, had not changed and would not change her love for him. He was an officer of the law, and he had killed her brother when the latter was engaged in a desperate attempt to commit a crime. And Tommy had sprung at him, had in effect attacked him and urged others to do the same. To shoot had been the only course open to Dick. Jean had understood that. Her attitude toward him after the tragedy had shown conclusively that she held him guiltless.

But how would she regard an attack on her father, an attack which if successful would bring him to ruin and disgrace? Would she look upon it as necessary, even justifiable, or would she turn in detestation and repulsion from the man who had instigated it? If he, Dick Leighton, made public the facts in his possession, would filial loyalty claim her allegiance or would she cleave to him?

And aside from all this there was the consideration of the effect on Jean of the knowledge that the mob had not been the spontaneous flame sprung

from the passions of men temporarily crazed by rage and hate, but a fire deliberately kindled and blown to a blaze—and by the brother she had so loved, who had been incited to the deed by his father. Already burdened as she was by grief, how would she bear a further shock? Would it not be cruel, inhuman, even, to subject her to it?

Then why do it? Why should he tell what he knew?

Seven paces to the foot of the four-poster, seven paces to the shaving-stand . . .

Why tell? What was the good of telling? What were the benefits to be derived from it, compared with the harm? And yet—

In the polished mirror of the little mahogany shaving-stand Dick Leighton looked at his own face with wonder and bewilderment in his eyes. What had happened to him that he should thus debate over a question that a month, a week, a day before he would have answered without a moment's hesitation?

What was this force within him that compelled him, against his inclination, against his practical judgment, against his will, to go on, be the consequences what they might? The force was there; he felt, almost irresistibly, the driving impulsion of it, urging him not to suppress his knowledge but to blazen it forth, to use it, at no matter what

cost to himself. But—for what? To what end?

And then suddenly, like a burst of sunlight through murky clouds, he knew. The issue before him was not private, not personal. The good or the harm that would follow as the result of his decision could not be scaled by the effect on him, on David Ainsworth, on Jean; its measure must be the measure of the effect on mankind.

All his life Richard Leighton had been an opportunist. While he had never committed an act that was fundamentally wrong, his point of view had been eminently a practical one: he had done that thing which seemed to promise the greatest benefit to himself or to those whom he desired to serve. His methods had differed from those of David Ainsworth not in kind, but only in degree. He saw it all now, saw it with a luminous clarity that amazed and startled him.

And he saw, too, that except in detail the issue he now faced differed in no wise from that which he had faced the night before. Right and wrong were squarely before him. He could choose the right, and risk the loss of everything he held most dear. Expediency, common sense, love—all were ranged on the side of wrong. Opposing them was a mere abstract principle, his duty. It was his duty as a man and a citizen to tell what he knew.

The crime that David Ainsworth had committed was one for which the possibilities of prosecution and conviction were very remote. At bottom it was actually the crime of expecting and counting on an equal moral laxity in others. If Ainsworth had for one moment dreamed that the sheriff would fight in defense of his prisoner, he would never have conceived the idea that had resulted in Tommy's death. He had simply seen an opportunity to triumph over his enemy, at no greater cost than the premature execution of a criminal whose life was already forfeit to the State.

"Ruin my future, shoot down my friends, for the sake of a filthy murderer who deserves to be lynched." Different words but essentially the same argument that David Ainsworth used, the same argument that thousands of men used when their ambitions or their desires conflicted with decency and honor and right. Thousands of men, so many that it had become a reasonable assumption that all men accepted the same point of view; no one was expected to do his duty if a sufficient number wanted to swerve him from it.

When the cry of "Lynch him!" arises, it is understood that an annoyed sheriff is, in all probability, already making plans, not to uphold his oath of office, but to save his face; not to fight to the last

ditch to protect the life in his charge, but to get out of a nasty situation with as little damage to himself and his adherents as possible.

A crime is committed. A man is arrested for it. If public sentiment be sufficiently aroused against the offender, somebody cries, "Lynch him!" A mob forms. A mob is created very easily. Any crowd of excited, overwrought men can be turned into a mob by the appearance of a leader. "Lynch him!" "String him up!" He may be innocent; he may be guilty. Why wait to prove him either? Lynch him first, and try him afterward!

A mob has no reasoning power, no sense of justice, no brain. It has only a voice and a lust for blood. It listens to no arguments, for there is only one argument it can understand and that is very seldom used against it. It is resistless because it knows that it will meet with no opposition worthy of the name. That is why it is born; that is why it is so terrible. It has no fear, because there is nothing of which to be afraid.

The law? Who 's going to uphold the law? Not the sheriff and his deputies. Nobody expects them to fight; nobody dreams that they will. They might get hurt if they did, or they might hurt some useful supporter. And for the sake of a scoundrel who deserves to be lynched? What 's Hecuba to them?

No; no need to worry about the sheriff. He has other things to consider; his friends, his own skin, his chances for reëlection. He 'll talk, but he won't shoot; it is n't done. "Come on and get him, boys!" And the mob goes on and gets him. Nobody 's hurt, except the prisoner. Nobody is punished, because it 's quite likely that the leaders are men of importance in the community, and it would never do to implicate them. Think of the scandal!

Oh, it 's perfectly safe, for everybody, and everybody knows that it is. Every individual member of the mob knows that it is.

But if every potential murderer knew that detection and conviction were inevitable, the percentage of murders would be enormously decreased. If every violence-breeding, law-defying adherent of ochlocracy knew that he would meet well-aimed bullets, instead of shrugs and time-worn excuses, there would be no mobs. There would be no leaders. The David Ainsworths who sit in comfortable libraries or offices would find that the game they had for so long played in perfect security was become hazardous in the extreme. Self-preservation would demand that they cease to break laws or to incite others to break them—in that particular way, at least.

It might even be possible to awaken a self-satisfied

section of the national community to the realization that the lynching of any human being, regardless of color or creed, is a crime of a particularly barbarous and cowardly sort; and that the majority of decent men and women regard it with horror, and its advocates and apologists with abhorrence and shrinking disgust.

But the awakening of the public conscience is not always a simple matter. The public, as a whole, exhibits the natural characteristics of its component parts. It is not the affair of a moment to spur it to definite and drastic action against a criminal or a number of criminals, if the crime has been committed against an individual who has aroused it to indignation and disgust. It deplores the crime of lynching, inveighs against it, wonders why nothing is done, and itself does nothing. But it is virtuously convinced that *somebody* ought to do something; somebody ought to start a movement against the ominously spreading menace; somebody ought to point and lead the way.

Seven steps to the foot of the four-poster; seven steps back to the shaving-stand . . .

"But why should I do it? Why should I be the first?" Dick Leighton demanded of the haggard man in the mirror.

Seven steps to the foot of the four-poster . . .

The pillows on the bed were laid flat and smooth,

but he seemed to see them piled one behind the other, and propped up on them, a thin, white-haired old man; an old man with eyes that, clear and bright, flickered under the bristling white brows with a glint like sunlight on blued steel. What was it the Judge had said? "Stand square with yourself. When you 're in the dark, keep still until you see light ahead. Then travel straight for it, no matter what or who gets in the way."

Seven paces back to the shaving-stand . . .

On one of the mahogany uprights was the straw hat Dick had hung there a few hours before. He picked it up and went out.

XXII

THROUGH the curtained windows of the library the flat, anemic daylight crept, struggling with the light from the electric globes and, worsted, achieving the petty triumph of making it appear too bright, too glaring, so that it sharpened everything in the room with a hard brilliance of detail.

To Dick Leighton, coming in from the rain-drenched grayness of outdoors, it seemed garish, like a flourish of brass trumpets in a confined space. He went over to the French windows and, pulling aside the curtains, looked out into the achromatic blur of the garden. The wet fingers of the fog painted every tree and bush and shrub with the same neutral tint; the grape arbor crept away out of sight into a veil of gray vapor, trailing behind it long streamers that billowed out, around and above the low-roofed garage, and piled themselves one on another like a puffy blanket. Globules of water, thick and oily-looking, formed constantly, and ran down the sloping eaves, dropping off in a little trickling stream that splashed, metallically monotonous, on the running-gear of a red roadster

that stood just outside the half-closed doors. Tommy's new roadster of which he had been so naïvely proud. It must have stood out there, forgotten, in the rain all night.

Dick pulled the curtain across the window and turned away, a tightness at his throat. He recalled the first day that Tommy, elaborately indifferent to the world, had driven the red car down street. Tommy, wearing the very latest thing in motor coats, with a peaked cap tilted aslant, lounging nonchalantly behind the wheel and sounding a blast on the horn at every crossing. He had blown it loudly at Dick, and given him a stiff salute.

The driving-gloves he had worn lay on the table now, beside the lamp: lemon-yellow gauntlets with large black buttons. Between the first and second fingers on one of them a brown scorch showed where a cigarette had burned down too close. There was a pile of stubs in the glass tray; a fine film of drab ash had settled over the table top. On the back of a chair near the door a turtle-necked sweater had been tossed; a striped cap had fallen to the floor beside it. Tommy had worn both cap and sweater when he joined one of the posses in the search for Cass Blake. On the mantel-shelf was Tommy's favorite pipe; a worn tobacco pouch; an automobile catalogue he had borrowed from Cory Jackson. Tommy had spent but little time in the room, yet

it seemed that nowhere could Dick turn his eyes but something reminded him vividly, insistently of the boy who had been.

Regret gripped him anew; regret and a sort of bitter resentment at the utter futility of it all. How the wanton gods of malicious destiny must have laughed! The boy whom he had known since childhood, the brother of the girl he loved!

Dick had steeled himself to meet David Ainsworth; he had not thought to see Jean. She came slowly into the room, while he stood uncertain what to say or do. The pallor of her drawn face, the pathetic droop of her mouth smote him. He felt that he would give anything in the world to be able to undo last night's work. Perhaps—not for the first time the doubt stabbed him—there had been some other way out; perhaps he had acted too hastily, fired too quickly. Yet he knew that he had not, and that there had been no other way.

"Dick," Jean said unsteadily, and held out both her hands to him. Her lips were trembling; the hot tears started again to her eyes.

He took her hands and pressed them. She swayed to him, and he drew her into his arms, looking down through a mist of tenderness at the dark head bowed against his shoulder.

"Dear," he said, and in his voice there was all the depth of his reverent love for her, infinite sym-

pathy for the sorrow that had aready come to her, infinite pity for that which was yet to come.

It was such comfort to her to rest there, in the circle of his arms. She seemed to draw strength from his strength, calm from his calm, healing from the quiet, grave power of him. She was nearly spent. Body and mind and spirit alike were plunged in a profound weariness that seemed to have drained her of all emotion. Little by little, the tension of her body relaxed. Like a tired child, she laid her head on his breast.

"It 's so good to be with you," she murmured. "I felt that I just had to see you."

He drew her to an easy-chair that, standing near the fireplace, was a little shielded from the glare of the lights, and sat down close to her, still keeping her hand in his.

"You 're worn out, dear," he said gently. "You 've been under a terrible strain. I hoped you were resting this morning. I did n't expect to see you, as a matter of fact. I asked Kitty for your father."

"I know; she told me. But he is n't at home. And—and—" she hesitated, flushed painfully—"you must n't see him, Dick. He—he 's very bitter against you."

"That 's only natural, Jean. After all, no matter what the circumstances, I fired the shot."

"It 's not only that. He blames you for everything; he won't listen to a word of justification." She pushed back her hair from her forehead and averted her face a little; she could not meet his eyes and repeat the monstrous thing to him. "He —he says that you would n't have fired on one of your own friends, but that you recognized Tommy and—and killed him deliberately."

"Good God! Jean, you don't believe that?" He knew that she did not; the question was purely impulsive. But the enormity of the accusation was such that her swift declaimer brought with it a sense of relief from an emotional fear as gripping as it was groundless.

"No, no! I tried to tell Father that it was n't true, but he would n't listen to me. He really thinks it *is* true, and he 's forbidden me ever to speak to you again. You must n't let him know that I 've seen you to-day; and you must keep out of his way for a while, until he 's himself again. He 's gone down street now, and you must go before he gets back."

'When do you expect him?"

"I don't know exactly. He told Auntie he wanted to find Mr. McAllister."

"Then he won't be long," Dick muttered, his lips compressed in a straight, hard line.

Jean cast a look of apprehension over her shoul-

der, as if she half expected to see her father standing in the doorway.

"Then you must go right away. It would n't do for him to find you here. Perhaps I ought not to have seen you at all to-day, but I—I felt that I had to. I wanted to tell you that, no matter what he says or thinks, I understand and believe in you." Now her eyes met his, squarely and honestly. "I love you, Dick. What—what happened last night is n't going to make any difference. Tommy was my brother and I loved him, but it 's not your fault that he—died. I had to tell you that, Dick. I could n't let you think that perhaps I—perhaps it had changed me toward you."

"Dear," he said again, and bent to touch reverent lips to her fingers.

"I—I thought I might not have another chance for some time," she went on tremulously. "It would n't be wise for us to oppose Father now. A little later I can reason with him, and make him see how terribly unjust he is, but if I tried now, I 'd only antagonize him. He 'd be furious if he knew that I had disobeyed him. And so we must n't see each other just yet; we 'll have to wait until he is less bitter toward you."

"He never will be, Jean."

"Oh, yes, Dick!" She put her hands against his broad chest, looking up into his face with plead-

ing eagerness. "I 'm certain that he will. Only give him a little time; he was so fond of Tommy; it 's been such a blow to him. Just give him a little time and he 'll realize that he is wrong. Just avoid him, keep out of his way for the present."

Dick shook his head.

"I 'm afraid I can't, Jean," he said miserably. "I 've got to see him to-day."

"But why?" she urged. "Why must you? It 's quite useless to reason with him now. He won't listen to you, any more than he would to me. He 'll just threaten and accuse."

"I realize that, Jean; but—"

"Then wait a little while. If you talk to him now, it will only harden him; perhaps it might estrange him from us forever. And that must n't happen."

There was, perhaps, nothing she could have said, no protestation she might have made, that would have touched Dick Leighton as did her unconscious use of that plural pronoun. It told him, more plainly than actual words could have that her faith in him was absolute and unshaken, that she stood with him for better or worse. "Estrange him from—us." Not from him, Richard Leighton, but from Richard Leighton and Jean Ainsworth, together. Tenderness, gratitude welled up in him; and mingled with them was a recurrent surge of

passionate pity and regret that he must hurt her still more than she had already been hurt. He said, very gently:

"You misunderstand, dear. I have no hope that your father will ever feel any more kindly toward me. I don't want to talk with him about personal matters; I 've come to see him on business."

"Business?"

"I 'm going to tell you, Jean. It 's only fair that you should know now, before this goes any further. I started to explain to you last night when Evans burst in, and then, of course, there was n't time. The fact of the matter is, I 've been asked to run for Congress."

"Against Father?"

He nodded. Rising, he began to pace slowly up and down the rug.

"For the past two or three elections a sentiment of opposition to your father has grown. I believe it was mostly downtown at first, on account of his failure to do anything about the Squatter Creek drainage proposition; but a good many people seemed to be dissatisfied because Cresston got an appropriation for a new post-office, and Randolph was n't mentioned at all. Anyway, for several years the idea has been floating around that this district ought to have another representative, preferably a younger man; but it did n't crystallize

until this spring. I was approached as a possibility, and my friends took it for granted that I would run; but I wanted to talk with you first and see what you thought about it."

He paused, considering, in some perplexity, how best to continue. It seemed brutal to add to her distress now, but she must know the truth before very long. Then better from him who loved her, and who could perhaps soften its harsher aspects, than from others in all its ugly reality.

"Go on," she said. "I understand so far, Dick." Almost from his first words she had understood one thing, at least: the reason for the antagonism which Tommy and her father had displayed toward the young sheriff the previous afternoon; there was no mystery about that now.

"I had never consented to be a candidate for the nomination, you know, Jean," Dick resumed; "never authorized the use of my name. But there were rumors, of course. We tried to keep it quiet, but 'The Banner' printed some editorials, and of course there was bound to be talk. Tommy got hold of it, and it made him pretty hot. He had a good deal to say about it downtown—expressed his opinion of me pretty freely—and, naturally, it all came back to me. He seemed to have the notion that I had n't any right even to consider accepting

the nomination; that your father was entitled to it by a sort of divine law. And your father and McAllister appeared to agree with him. McAllister was so sure of it that he told two or three friends of mine it was preposterous for them to attempt to nominate any one but your father. But when they 'd looked the situation over a bit they began to find out that there was considerably more opposition in the district than they had supposed. Mind you, they considered it as settled that I was going to run.

"McAllister scuttled around, trying to get the old organization in line, and when it did n't pan out to suit him he began to get worried. There were two or three conferences and a good deal of nosing around to see if anything I 'd done could be dug up and used against me—something discreditable, of course, that would make effectual campaign material. Tommy poked about downtown and McAllister on the Hill, but, as far as I could find out, they did n't unearth anything that was worth using. And then this Blake affair happened."

"Yes," said Jean. She was sitting bolt upright in the chair now, her fingers spread out over the arms, closing and unclosing nervously. There was a look of dread in her eyes. Something in Dick's voice, in the repression of his manner, in the care

with which he chose his words filled her with apprehension.

He went on:

"You know, Jean, the average voter is a good deal of a sheep; he follows the bell. If it happens to be pretty loud he just makes a blind dive for it, without stopping to look around and make sure whether it 's really on the right neck or not. Blake's trial, which would have come off just a little while before the primaries, would have been a big noise for me. In the natural course of things I 'd have been a fairly prominent figure in it. It appeared to be mighty unfortunate for them that Blake had been caught at all, because if he had n't they might have made a little capital out of it—talked about the sheriff's failure to get him, inefficiency and all that, and so on up to my general incompetence for any kind of office whatever. But Blake had been made a prisoner, and he 'd have to be tried at a time that would give me a still greater advantage, because I 'd be mentioned; I 'd be more or less in the public eye, as it were."

Dick paused again, glancing sidewise at Jean. She had not moved from her position. Only her fingers had ceased their restless twitching, and were gripping the chair arms. Dick moved over in front of the fireplace and stood there, head bent a little, hands deep in his pockets.

"From the point of view of every one who was opposed to my candidacy," he said slowly, "Blake came pretty near being a catastrophe, and the only way to avert it seemed to be to find some method of discrediting me. For instance, if the crowd in the Square when we brought him down from the mill had been a little more excited and taken him away from the posse, it would have helped a lot. Or, if some of the hotheads stirred up a riot and staged a lynching-bee, that would put an end to any trouble that I 'd ever give, politically.

"The fly in the ointment was that the crowd had cooled off, more or less; and while everybody hated Blake and was thoroughly roused against him, nobody, except possibly old Matt Foster, had enough direct personal interest to stir it up again. There was n't any leader for a mob, and without a leader there would n't be any lynching—and I should n't be discredited.

"Well, the leader was found—an impulsive, excitable boy, who thought that he was doing a very heroic and splendid thing. And that 's what I came to talk to your father about, Jean, why I 've got to see him to-day."

Jean was white to the lips.

"There 's no mistake? no chance of it? You 're sure?"

"Absolutely sure, Jean. Do you think that if

there were the remotest doubt I should tell you this? I feel like a brute and a cad to hurt you so; but the truth has got to come out, and you 'd have to know it anyway."

She drew a long shuddering breath.

"I could understand how Tommy might have been carried away by excitement, influenced by older men; but to *lead* them—and for a sordid, selfish purpose—Dick, must you tell Father now, at once? He 's had so much to bear; and if he learned now that Tommy was killed while he was trying to help him—in such a way—I think it would kill him, too. Must you tell him, Dick?"

He looked down at her with grave, pitying eyes. He did not answer at once. Somehow, he could not force his lips to utter the words that should strip bare this last ugly detail.

"Why do you look at me like that?" she demanded. She started from her chair and took a swift step toward him. Then her hand flew to her throat; horrified comprehension dawned in her face. "You mean that it was Father who planned it? That he sent Tommy down there to stir up the men, to incite a murder—"

"He did n't look at it that way, Jean," Dick interrupted quickly. "He simply wanted to discredit me, and he thought it could be done if an attempt were made to lynch the prisoner that I

was guarding. He had n't any idea I 'd resist; he thought he had me fixed so that I could n't get out without doing for myself. Why, if he 'd dreamed that there was going to be any trouble he 'd never have let Tommy go downtown!"

"But the lynching—"

"That was only an incident, Jean, just a move in the game. Nobody had any pity or sympathy for Blake; he did n't deserve any. Your father knew that he 'd killed Norah, and that a jury would give him the same sentence that the mob wanted to execute. You must n't judge your father too harshly, Jean. His methods are n't new; they 're the same that other men are using nearly every day. Why, you can't pick up a daily newspaper without reading how a mob has stormed a jail or a court-room, or held up an automobile and taken a prisoner away from the sheriff!

"Sometimes there are just whisky and rage back of it, but more often there 's some other motive. Half the time the yellow newspapers are to blame; they print lurid articles, with just enough basis of truth so that they 'll get by; they try the prisoner and condemn him in print and get everybody all worked up into a frenzy. They consider it perfectly legitimate, good business. They want to get a big 'news story' out of it and increase their circulation; or maybe they have a political ax to

grind. Some one is going to profit, that 's all, and the end justifies the means. Your father used 'practical' methods, Jean, as I might have done myself if I had been brought face to face with the same set of circumstances."

She made a quick gesture of dissent.

"I say I might have done the same. Why not? Is there any very vital difference between your father's point of view and mine? You know that last night I was going to let the mob take Blake; I 'd made up my mind not to resist. Then you—"

"Nothing I said made any difference, Dick. You 'd have done exactly the same if I had n't been there."

He shook his head.

"I don't know," he said honestly. "When you talked to me, I saw your reasoning, all right; but it seemed to me that you were just theorizing about something in the abstract, while I was up against the concrete. It was blurred and foggy then; I could n't think; it was all such an appalling muddle; I could n't see ahead at all."

"It 's terrible," she said. "It 's—hideous. What are we going to do, Dick? What can we do?"

"There 's just one thing to do, Jean."

"Oh, yes!" she agreed feverishly. "We 've got to plan for Father. Because if it should become known—"

"It 's got to be known, Jean," he told her gravely. "All of it."

"Oh, no! Is n't there any way we can stop it, Dick?"

"Yes; we can stop it. But—" he drew a long breath between his shut teeth—"but we must not."

"Must not? We 've got to!" Fear sharpened her voice. "We 've got to stop it, Dick! Do you realize what it will mean?—how all the papers will feature it? A Congressman implicated in a lynching, encouraging it. Why, the whole country would be pointing the finger of shame at us! We 'd be notorious, infamous!"

"That is just why it must be known, Jean. Can't you see, it 's only by making exposure inevitable that these things can be stopped? They 've been glossed over and made light of too long. It 's gotten to the point where lynching has become a kind of popular sport. I know that sounds flippant, but is n't it a fact? Men who consider themselves law-abiding citizens and who would be righteously indignant if any one accused them of a trifling misdemeanor, argue to themselves that they 're doing the State a service when they help to tie a rope around the neck of a prisoner, drag him out of the county jail, and hang him to the limb of a tree. They 're 'saving the taxpayers the expense of a trial,' 'making an example of him that will

have a restraining effect on others of his kind.' That 's their reasoning; and it 's false, every bit of it. Lynch law never had any restraining effect on anything or anybody. It lets loose all the worst passions, turns sane men into maniacs and maniacs into fiends.

"Men have never taken the law into their own hands without doing tremendous harm. In Reconstruction days the Ku Klux Klan went mad with the lust of blood and unbridled power, and degenerated into a band of cowardly murderers. Every time a life is taken without sanction of the law civilization is pushed back one step toward barbarism."

"But, Dick, my father—"

"There 's always somebody's father, Jean; that 's just why these things go on."

Somebody's father or brother or son or friend or neighbor or employer or associate. Somebody who must be shielded, whose part in the dirty, cowardly business must not become known, lest he get into trouble: the vicious circle, in which immunity from punishment begets further recklessness, which spurs on to fresh excesses, and which spreads and widens, like the ever-widening ripples that spread across the surface of a pond when a stone has been cast into the water.

In the light of his new understanding it was all

so plain to Dick Leighton—the deadly poison that, subtle in its influence as it was malignant in its action, permeating the whole body politic, attacking the healthy tissues laboriously built up by the evolution of civilization, breaking out into ulcers of which lynching is only one symptom; the poison of the mob spirit, virulent, dangerous, contagious, inoculating laborer and capitalist alike, individually and collectively, breeding dishonesty, corruption, and anarchy.

But to Jean there was only the terrible fact of her father's guilty complicity, and of all that the public revelation of it would mean to him and to her. She could not believe that Dick really meant it; she did not grasp the significance of his attitude, nor realize on what foundation rested his resolution. She said piteously:

"Is n't it enough that Tommy is dead?"

"Is Tommy's death to go for nothing? Can we turn back now? Or are we to go on and try to make others see the menace of it as we see it?"

"But, Dick, don't you see what it will mean to me, to you, to both of us?" She caught at his arm appealingly. "It 's our future, our happiness, all our life together. Oh, I beg of you, don't, don't do it! It 's all true, what you say, but why should we be the ones to be sacrificed? Oh, Dick, for my sake, give it up!"

He took one quick, impulsive step toward her, then as quickly turned away, his hands clenched at his sides.

"I can't," he said; and she knew that, do or say what she might, she could not move him. He groped for words. "Jean, you said last night that there 's only one right way. Because I saw it dimly then, I staked my career, my future, the lives of my friends. And to-day, when I see it clearly, I can't turn aside from it, even for you. I 've got to go on."

Slowly she turned and went back to her chair. There was a long silence. Then:

"You are right, Dick," she said, speaking with difficulty. "I 've known all along that you were right. But—oh, Dick, it 's so much harder to do right than to talk about it—when it comes home! It—all this—means that we 'll be separated."

"But, Jean—"

"Father 's never needed me before. Don't you see he 's lost Tommy; he 's going to lose the position he values above everything. His name will be a byword. And I 've got to stay with him. I 'm all he has left."

"I need you, too, Jean. Are you going to ask me to give you up? We love each other. Jean, this thing can't come between us. You 're light and hope and happiness to me. You 're too fine,

too big, to urge me to turn aside from what we both know to be right. Tell me you won't let it—that you 're going to stand by me."

"I 'm not asking you to turn aside, now, Dick; but I can't desert my father. You have your duty —I see it now—and I have mine. One is just as plain as the other. We—" her voice broke, but she steadied it and finished bravely—"we 've come to the end of things together, dear."

"No! I 'm not going to let you go, Jean. I—" He stopped abruptly. The library door had opened. David Ainsworth stood on the threshold.

XXIII

THERE is a certain type of mind in which the moral status of an act is determined by the direct consequences of the act itself, and not by any conception of abstract right and wrong. It is likely to arrogate to its possessor a sense of his own infallibility, based on the illogical conviction that whatsoever he does is right because otherwise he would not do it. When harm ensues, directly or indirectly, as the result of an act of his, he promptly disclaims all responsibility, reasoning from the ingenious hypothesis that no evil could possibly be inherent in the act itself or in the motive that prompted it, and that therefore some one else is at fault.

He is righteously incensed at the stupidity or deliberate knavishness of whomsoever he pitches on as the scapegoat; and the more unpleasant the consequences of what he has done, the greater the need of quieting the qualms of a conscience that he refuses to admit is troubling him.

Probably there is not a man—or a woman—in the world who has not at some time invented a plausible excuse for shifting to some one else the

responsibility for his own fault. With David Ainsworth the practice was habitual. If his plans were successful the credit belonged to him; if anything went wrong it was not his fault. In Randolph, Samuel McAllister had always made a convenient and easy burnt-offering for errors of judgment or tactical blunders; at the capital there was a meek and self-effacing secretary who never resented being sneered at or reprimanded for mistakes he had not made.

But the disastrous outcome of Tommy's walk downtown to "see what was going on" could not be charged to the secretary or to McAllister. The responsibility lay elsewhere. Deep down in his heart, David Ainsworth knew where; but the knowledge was something he dared not face. He turned from it, smothered it, buried it beneath the blazing pyre of his rage against Dick Leighton. From the inescapable sense of guilt, from the agony of remorse and regret that tormented him he instinctively took refuge in his hatred. It consumed him. But as he stood in the doorway of the library, an erect, commanding figure, there was no trace of emotion in either face or voice.

As Dick caught sight of him he came into the room.

"What are you doing here, sir?" he asked. "You 'll oblige me by leaving my house at once."

Jean started toward him; he waved her aside peremptorily. "Less than an hour ago I forbade you to see this man," he told her sternly. "Is this the way you obey me?" So might he have spoken to a child of ten who had defied parental authority; he merely glanced at her and then turned back to Dick: "Mr. Leighton, I am waiting."

The young man flushed in resentment at the tone; but he answered quietly:

"I am here on official business, Mr. Ainsworth."

"With my daughter?" the Congressman inquired ironically.

"Unfortunately, it must concern her, although I came to see you."

"Nothing with which you are connected can concern my daughter in any way whatever, nor necessitate a personal interview with me." Ainsworth inclined his head toward the door. "I have requested you to leave, sir."

But Dick did not move.

"I said my business was official, Mr. Ainsworth," he pointed out calmly. "I 'm afraid I must trouble you for a few minutes longer."

"Very well, then. Jean, will you kindly leave us? Mr. Leighton's business has nothing to do with you."

"But it has, Father," the girl said gently. "Won't you let me stay with you?"

"You already know what it is, then?"

"Yes."

The Congressman's brows flattened.

"Oh," he murmured. "As long as you came ostensibly to see me, Mr. Leighton, it might appear reasonable that you state your errand to me, as well as to my daughter. May I ask what you have told her?"

Despite the sneer that underlay the formal civility of the words Dick's manner was unruffled. He spoke quietly, but his answer was straight to the point:

"I told her that you were at the bottom of that attempt to lynch Cass Blake last night; that you not only knew Tommy was going to try to stir up a mob, but suggested the idea to him in the first place!"

Ainsworth still sneered, but his lips were white.

"A manly and honorable course, that," he said. "To come to my house when I was not at home and malign me and my dead son, to my daughter! What chivalry! What noble consideration to show a woman!" And to Jean: "I told you, Jean, that this fellow was unfit for you to know, but you would n't accept my judgment; you had to see for yourself. Well, you have seen. I have to thank you, Mr. Leighton, for proving to my daughter that you are a contemptible scoundrel!"

"Dick told me nothing that I should not have learned elsewhere, Father."

The dark blood flooded to Ainsworth's forehead, then receded, leaving his face deathly. He spoke in a voice of cold fury:

"In the face of my express commands you receive this man. You listen to his calumnies against your dead brother and against me—listen to them and believe them! What are you, that you stand there flaunting your shame, your abandonment of all decency and self-respect—"

"One moment, Mr. Ainsworth!" Dick thrust forward between them. "You—"

"I am not talking to you, sir!"

"But I 'm going to talk to you!" The attack on Jean had been so sudden, so vicious, that the young man could not contain himself. "How dare you speak like that? Jean is the woman I love, and—"

"Yes, you 've shown that! You 've shown her what the thing you call love is. And if she had not utterly lost all sense of shame—"

"Shame!" Dick interrupted sternly. "The shame should be yours, sir!"

The Congressman pointed a shaking finger at the doorway.

"Leave my house!" he commanded. "Not another word! I won't listen to you, the man who

has corrupted my daughter and murdered my son!"

Dick moved, but not toward the door. One quick step brought him to the table; he rested his hands on it and leaned forward, his fingers gripping the mahogany rim.

"You talk of corruption and murder!" he said in a low tense voice. "You who corrupted your own son by sending him out to do your dirty political work, who subjected him to one evil influence after another, and who finally sent him out to commit the crime that resulted in his death! David Ainsworth, you and no other murdered that boy!"

From head to foot the Congressman stiffened, like one who has received a sword-thrust through the body.

"Damn you!" he snarled. "You stand there and say these things to me—"

"They 're true, and you know it! You wanted a lynching last night, and you sent your son to see that there was one!"

"You lie! And the people of this community are going to know that you stop at nothing to further your schemes! You 've been pretty clever heretofore, but you 've gone too far now! I'm going to have you indicted for murder. I 'll make your name a stench in the nostrils of the State. I 'll—"

Dick cut him short curtly, quietly:

"I've *proof* of what I say, Mr. Ainsworth. I have the evidence of men in the mob last night, their sworn statement as to what your son said to them—"

Ainsworth laughed raspingly:

"Conclusive proof! The evidence of a crowd of ruffians seeking to shift the responsibility from themselves to a boy who is dead and unable to speak in his own defense! How far do you think that sort of 'proof' will take you?"

"That is n't all, sir. I went to some one nearer to you. I showed him the situation in which you had placed yourself by your defiance of every moral and legal restraint that seemed to stand in the way of your ambition. And when I charged him with being a party to the conspiracy which I know was hatched here in your library yesterday afternoon, he was only too anxious to talk. McAllister has told me everything that took place here yesterday—exactly how you put it into that poor boy's head to go downtown last night and start trouble."

"McAllister?" Ainsworth muttered. "McAllister?"

"McAllister. That," Dick added grimly, "is why you could n't reach him this morning."

It was a long time before Ainsworth could rally his scattered forces sufficiently to make reply. Jean, standing rigid with fear and suspense, watched

the silent struggle he made to pull himself together. Finally:

"Then we shall see which the public will believe," he said hoarsely, "you, a treacherous, cowardly schemer, or me, the man who has for years honorably fulfilled his public trust."

"Very well, Mr. Ainsworth," Dick said quietly. "I 'm willing to leave it to the public, if you are."

"I 'll show you up for what you are," the Congressman went on, his voice thickening; "I 'll let people know how you struck at me in the dark, worked to undermine my position; how you used every low and dishonorable device, even defaming me to my daughter, after you had foully murdered the innocent boy who—"

Jean's cry of protest interrupted him; he turned on her:

"You defend him now! Less than an hour ago you convicted him out of your own mouth. You proved he had murdered your brother!"

"I did not! And it 's not true!"

"It 's true enough for my purpose!"

Dick caught up the phrase. His eyes flashed; there was a clear, ringing note in his voice.

"Yes," he said, "it 's true enough for your purpose. Anything is 'true enough' for men like you. You 're like the mob, blind with hate and prejudice. You don't care what happens to any one else as

a result of your acts; you want your own way, and it 's of no consequence to you who suffers while you 're getting it. Last night you turned a crowd of men loose against a criminal. To-morrow you 're planning to turn loose a swarm of lies and calumnies against an innocent man." His eyes met Ainsworth's fearlessly, challengingly. "Guilty or innocent," he said, "it does n't matter to you, if it 's to your interest to destroy him."

The Congressman had recovered his poise; his manner was self-contained, incisive.

"I repeat, I shall fight you with every weapon in my power!" he said. "And I 'll get you, Leighton; remember that! I 'll—"

"Father, don't!" Jean broke in desperately. "You can't go on this way. See what it has brought us now. It will only lead to more misery and unhappiness."

He went on as if she had not spoken:

"I 'll make the State too hot to hold you. When I 've done with you you 'll be branded as the cowardly murderer that you are. There are laws to deal with you and your kind—"

Again Jean broke in, this time compelling his attention:

"Then, if you 're determined to do this thing, I can't stay with you, Father."

"What!" he demanded.

"I 've tried to be loyal to you, but you won't let me. I wanted to stand by you; I meant to, even through all the disgrace that is bound to come to us when people find out how and why Tommy was killed. But I can't stand tamely by and see you deliberately commit another crime. I can't be a party to it, and I should be, if I stayed here."

"You—" Ainsworth checked himself as the door swung suddenly open, and Miss Nestor came into the room. Her lips were quivering and her face was wet with tears.

"David," she said timidly, "they 've brought Tommy home."

Jean uttered a choking cry. Mary Nestor's arms went out to her.

For a moment Dick stood silent, irresolute. Then with a little hopeless gesture he turned away.

XXIV

THE *Phlox sublata* had blossomed and faded, but the sweet alyssum formed a border of fragrant white, and the nine tall rose-trees were in full bloom. From the arbor at the back of the garden Jean could see the double rank of four, marching toward "the odd one at the foot," could catch the glint of sunlight where it played on the marble headstone between the swaying branches.

The resting-place of Gordon Randolph was on the sunny slope of the hill, separated by a fringe of willows and slim white birches from the broad plateau to which Cemetery Street climbed from the west. The grass was rich and green there, the earth a friendly brown, so different from the raw redness of that other mound beyond, where the grass had been crushed and trampled by the feet of the morbidly curious.

It was the contrast that hurt Jean. She tried not to think of it, but the picture kept coming back: the muddy ground, steaming under the low-hanging branches of the trees; the long grass, matted into a tangled mass of slippery green; the solid circle of wet umbrellas that moved only to

press closer, and to reveal round white faces, blurred behind the curtain of rain. It kept coming back.

There were other pictures, too. For days they had flitted, bat-like, through her consciousness; now this one, now that, in no ordered sequence, but coming and going aimlessly, as if they darted in out of the dark and circled 'round and 'round the lamp of memory. Faces. Tommy's face, white and terribly still; her father's face, set like a stone mask in which the eyes were glazed with red hate; Dick's face, haggard, despairing as the little hopeless gesture he had made when he turned to pass Miss Nestor at the door of the library.

And always the sound of the scuffle and tramp of hurrying feet. They were running up the stairs of the hospital; they were shuffling along in front of the house. They were trampling across the sodden grass and splashing through puddles. They were scurrying from around corners and stopping suddenly just behind one.

Night and day, in her waking moments and through all her dreams, the faces had watched and the feet had followed. It was only out in the little arbor, away at the back of the garden, that she could get away from the nagging torment of them. There in the fragrant summer stillness, little by little the jangled discord of her mind had resolved itself into something like harmony. From

the quiet peace that brooded over the sweep of hills and sky she seemed to draw the strength and courage that had been drained from her.

On the bench beside her chair lay the book she had been pretending to read. It served as an excuse for slipping off by herself. As long as she was apparently absorbed in it she could be sure of being left alone for a little; otherwise Miss Nestor was sure to send Kitty, or Ezra the gardener, with a message, or come herself on some transparent pretext.

Jean appreciated her aunt's solicitude for her, and was grateful for the affection that lay behind it; but she was impatient of the interruption. She wanted to be alone, to think; and though her thoughts had presented themselves more as a series of impressions—some vivid and distinct to the point of brilliance, others vague, distorted, mere meaningless trivialities—gradually she had achieved some sort of coördination; slowly there had grown on her the realization that she was confronting a problem and that no one could help her to settle it. The solution, if real solution there were, she must find for herself.

She had not communicated with Dick since the day nearly three weeks before when Tommy's body had been brought home from the hospital, and in blind, voiceless grief she had turned from him and

from her father to the mothering arms of Mary Nestor. He had not come to the house and she had not even tried to get in touch with him. At first she had been too dazed, too confused; one emotional crisis after another had literally shocked her into a condition of mental inertia. She did only those things that presented themselves as absolutely necessary to be done; the slightest exertion required an effort that left her almost exhausted.

But as she gradually rallied to a state more nearly normal she found that, despite her unchanged love for Dick Leighton, despite her passionate desire for his happiness, she shrank from the thought of meeting him.

She had seen him once only, one morning when an errand had taken her down street. He had stopped to talk to Squire Moore, just outside the shop she had entered. She had purposely dallied over her purchase until he finished his conversation and moved away. Before she reached home she had been seized with a sinking fear that he might have seen her inside the shop, might have divined her intention of avoiding him. She almost ran back to Main Avenue, but Dick was nowhere in sight. She stopped at the corner a moment, looking up and down the street.

Victor Rivers, the young proprietor of the stationery store, came out to the sidewalk and, pleasantly

enough, inquired if there were anything he could do for her. "The Register," he suggested, was just off the press. She had thanked him, given him five cents for the paper, and carried it home, leaving it, still folded, on the library table.

An hour later she found it, crumpled and twisted, flung into the grate. She took it out, smoothed out the pages, and read it.

That same night she had a talk with her father, the first to exceed the barest exchange of formal civilities since the morning after Tommy's death. It could not have been called a satisfactory interview, except in so far as it made clear to Jean the anomalous position in which she stood, and spurred her, for very shame of her own vacillation, into decisive thought and action. For David Ainsworth had made it quite clear that he had not altered his expressed intentions with regard to Dick Leighton.

Cold, hard, implacable, he had turned a deaf ear to her plea for justice, for common, open-minded fairness. He had closed his mind against everything but hatred and the desire for revenge upon the man whom he asserted to be guilty of the foulest treachery. He was not to be moved from the stand he had taken; and it was with a miserable sense of the utter futility of her arguments that

Jean left him. As well reason with the twisted pear-tree that whipped itself frenziedly every time the wind blew! Its fury served only to injure it; the branches had lashed one against the other until the whole stem was bent and warped. But no amount of props and braces and judicious pruning could change its habit.

Curiously enough, the comparison suggested itself to Jean, although she saw only the similarity of the results. She saw the deepening of the lines about her father's mouth, the added arrogance in the poise of his head, the cold opacity of his eyes; she became more and more conscious of the vicious, consuming selfishness of his whole attitude. She did not suspect the warfare that was being waged in David Ainsworth's soul.

Jean had never loved her father very deeply. He was not the sort of man to inspire in his children any but the sterner emotions. Respect and admiration she had given him, and a loyalty that was as much inherited as it was the result of early training. But now it seemed to Jean that he was deserving of nothing so much as scorn. Whatever claims he might have had upon her he had forfeited, and deliberately, since only by deliberately refusing to see was he blind to the infamy of his course. To her there could be no question that he was simply

shutting his eyes to it; the way in which his accusations against Dick had been received in the town was proof enough of that.

First incredulity, then derision, then open hostility or contempt, according to the temperament of his audience. Even Squire Moore, a lifelong friend and neighbor, had called him a "vile, filthy slanderer, sir!" at a public meeting, and thereafter cut him dead. Others had followed the Squire's lead. "The Register" printed guarded and cautious editorials, in which reference was made to "actionable statements," and counseled moderation —"The Register," which for twenty years had been but the voice of the king who could do no wrong. Small boys jeered in the streets. They paraded past the house and committed sundry trivial annoyances. Ezra complained that two of his choice rose-beds, planted on the lawn near the end of the walk, had been denuded of every bud. One enterprising youth, apprehended in the act of prying the black enamel number from the bottom step of the veranda, had explained that he wanted it for a souvenir.

"But I give him what fer!" Ezra chuckled triumphantly to Jean. "I sooveneered *him*, right and proper, you bet!"

Jean did not inquire in just what form the punishment had been administered, although she

knew that Ezra was tingling to tell her. It was all part of the incredible nightmare of the past few weeks.

Ezra shifted from one foot to the other and brushed an imaginary spider-web from the trellis at the side of the arbor.

"Is there anything you 'd like to have me 'tend to, Miss Jean?" he asked.

"Nothing, thank you, Ezra."

"Miss Nestor, she said she guessed maybe you might want something fixed different, maybe. I thought I 'd just ask—"

"No, there's nothing now, Ezra. When there is, I 'll let you know." She took up the book from the bench, and the gardener, dismissed, went off, shaking his head. As soon as he was out of sight Jean put the book down again, and, leaning her head against the back of her chair, let her eyes rest on the sunny hillside.

Up there, under that smooth green counterpane fringed with white, lay all that was mortal of Gordon Randolph, the last of his name and race. The love he had borne her mother was no secret to Jean. Nor was the contemptuous distrust in which he had held her father; this had been the one speck in the clear amber of the girl's whole-hearted affection for the shrewd, vigorous old man, whose sardonic tongue clove sharply to the heart of things, and whose

cynical philosophy went no deeper than the tarnish that conceals but does not detract from the sterling purity of the metal beneath.

If Gordon Randolph had had a daughter, she would never have had to face such a problem as Jean was facing. And what would he have thought of this hesitation, this drifting indecision on the part of the daughter of the woman he had loved? Jean knew very well that he would have said: "It's the Ainsworth in her, not the Nestor." He had told her once, bluntly, that her father could n't see the woods because of his own trees and she had been very angry with him, for as long as any one could be angry with the Judge. If he could speak to her now, he would say the same thing of her; and—she acknowledged it with a burning sense of shame and self-disdain—he would be right.

Abruptly she got to her feet and went into the house. The door of her father's study was closed. She drew a long breath and unconsciously squared her shoulders before she knocked.

"Come in," said Ainsworth's voice. He was sitting at his desk, pen in hand; but he had not been writing, for there was no paper before him. He looked at her inquiringly. "Well, Jean?"

"I 've come to tell you, Father," she said, "that I 'm going back to my work in New York Monday morning."

XXV

AFTER dinner Saturday night, Mary Nestor carried her mending basket into the library and put it down on the center table beside the lamp. Jean looked up from her book, smiled, and moved a chair forward a little.

"That 's all right, dear; don't disturb yourself," her aunt said. "I can see perfectly well here." She slipped the darning-egg into the toe of a white lisle stocking, and threaded her needle. Then she leaned across the table to Jean.

"*Must* you go, dear?" she asked tremulously. "I can't believe that you 'll be here only one more evening. When I see you sitting there, and try to realize that after to-morrow you 'll be gone, it just does n't seem possible. You—why, you 're really not able to go back to work, dear! You 'll break down again. I do so wish you would n't try, Jean." She reached for Jean's hand and lifted it to her face. The girl felt the warmth of tears upon it. She turned her lips to the soft wrinkled palm.

"Don't worry about me, Aunt Mary," she said. "Physically I 'm perfectly well. As for the rest, I 've been through it all and come out on the other

side." It was no mere empty assurance. She had struggled along her dark road, through the valley of self-questioning and vacillation; and light had come to her, even as it had come to Dick Leighton. She meant to follow it. The decision had brought to her a sense of strength, a calm of spirit such as she had not known since her return to Randolph.

"I 'm glad of that, Jean," Miss Nestor said. "I 'm glad, even though it takes you away. But—does your work in New York mean so much to you that you can't stay with us?"

"No; you know it is n't that, Aunt Mary, although I want to be busy. I could n't just sit and do nothing, you know."

"You could be busy here, could n't you?" Miss Nestor advanced the suggestion tentatively. "There 's the hospital."

The girl made a gesture of repugnance.

"No. That 's out of the question. I simply could n't do it. I 've thought it all out, Aunt Mary. The best thing, the only thing, is for me to go back to New York."

Miss Nestor withdrew her hand from Jean's, and picked up her darning again. She ran the needle back and forth a few times before she said, rather hesitatingly:

"You know, dear, I don't mean to belittle your work in New York. I understand how much you

liked it, and how well you succeeded. Perhaps in a way it 's the sort you are best fitted for, but of course I don't pretend to know about that. What I do know, though, Jean, is that there 's another sort of work for you here; and to me it seems more important to you than anything else possibly could be. I mean," she said as Jean looked at her interrogatively, "your father. He needs you, needs you more than your surgeons or your patients or your social-settlement people, or anybody in the world."

Jean shook her head slowly.

"No; you 're mistaken, Aunt Mary. I thought he did, too, at first. I thought I could help him, and that my first duty was to him. But I was wrong. He does n't need me. He does n't need anybody. He 's quite sufficient unto himself. I 've talked to him, tried to make him see my point of view, or at least to admit that I have a point of view. I might as well have saved my breath. And I said my last word to-day."

"But, Jean," pleaded Miss Nestor, "is it really any wonder that he 's bitter? Why, his very suffering makes him so! Think just a moment. Two weeks before you came back to Randolph he had everything. Even the little breach between you and him was healed over. You were coming to take charge of the hospital that he 'd built and was

so proud of. He was proud of your ability to do it, proud of Tommy, proud of the fact that every one looked up to him and respected him. He was the biggest man in the county, and he was proud of that, too.

"And now—what has he now? Tommy is dead; and because of—of the way he died, your father's oldest friends are turning their backs on him; some of them go out of their way to avoid speaking to him. Downtown, people simply hoot at him on the streets. He has n't mentioned the hospital once, nor been there. The newspapers have said cruel things about him. Just because his pride has kept him outwardly much the same, you think he has n't suffered; but I see further than you do. He has—terribly."

"And yet he keeps right on doing everything he can to insult the intelligence of decent people. After the way he talked to Squire Moore, is it very surprising that the Squire won't speak to him? Or that the mill-hands hoot at him when he said publicly that they were a crowd of blackguards, trying to shift responsibility from themselves to an innocent boy who was worth a thousand of them? Is n't it possible, just barely possible, Aunt Mary, that Andy Murray is just as dear to Bill, as Tommy was to Father? There are some things, you must know, Auntie, that a man can't say, no matter how he feels,

if he 's going to keep the respect of his fellow men."

Miss Nestor admitted that this was so.

"But it 's not the general public sentiment against him that has hurt your father most, Jean," she added. "No, nor even the way his friends have turned against him. It 's your attitude, more than anything else."

"My attitude?"

"When he comes into the room you almost shrink from him."

Jean knitted her brows.

"Why—why, no, Aunt Mary," she said. "I don't do that."

"Perhaps you don't do it consciously, but I 've noticed it, and so has he. He feels it most keenly, my dear."

"I 'm sorry," Jean said. "I was n't in the least aware of it. If I 've shrunk from Father, as you say, the action must have been purely instinctive, because I *have* shrunk from the abominable course that he has been taking. He can't be sincere in what he says; it seems to me to be a hypocritical pose, a kind of corrupt strategy to cover the desperate weakness of his own position."

"Jean!" Miss Nestor raised her hand in protest. "You must n't say such a thing; you must n't let yourself believe it, because it can't possibly be true. You 're too hard, dear child. You ought not to

be so quick to judge. I tell you that David has suffered greatly. He—he 's really a sick man, Jean, and if you go away and leave him now, when he has lost everything else that he values, it will go hard with him. He needs you more than he ever did before."

But Jean shook her head, unconvinced.

"No, he does n't," she said stubbornly. "And if it 's really true that I seem to shrink from him, and he 's noticed it, then it 's only one more reason for my going away Monday morning. Because as long as I stay here I shall continue to feel toward him just the way I do now."

"But you told him you 'd stay if he withdrew entirely from this campaign and retracted the charges he had made."

"Yes; I could respect him then, at least. I could forgive him for—for what he did to Tommy. I can't forgive him for what he 's doing now—deliberately distorting the truth, trying to make people believe what he knows to be the foulest of lies. I can't forgive him, Aunt Mary,"—the girl's clear eyes met her aunt's squarely—"for trying to offer Dick Leighton up as a sacrifice on the altar of his pride, and as a scapegoat for his own wickedness. He himself put it into Tommy's head to go downtown that night to stir up a mob against Cass Blake. He knows that when Dick fired he

was simply doing his duty and that he had no other motive. Whatever Father may have believed at first, under the shock of his grief and horror, he knows now that Dick is innocent; and he still keeps declaring that he is guilty. That 's what I can't forgive. And I can't forgive myself for staying here in the same house with him while he has been doing this thing. The way I 've acted is very nearly as little excusable."

"The way *you 've* acted, Jean?" repeated Miss Nestor, in puzzled astonishment. "Why, what do you mean? How else *could* you have acted?"

"I could have done what I knew to be right, instead of sitting down and feeling sorry for myself!" Jean told her with fierce bitterness. "I talked a lot—very fine-sounding talk, too— about 'duty' and 'honor' and 'right.' I called Dick a coward because he wavered for a moment, when he was facing the biggest crisis of his life. But when it came home to me, did *I* face it? No, I did n't. I was n't big enough. I just stood out of the way and cried and wrung my hands, and let Dick fight all alone."

"But, Jean dear, you were frightfully shocked and overwrought. Dick could 'nt expect—"

"He expected nothing, and that 's what he got!" flashed the girl. "He needed me. He was the only one who *did* need me; but I thought only of our loss, our trouble, never of what he had to bear,

He staked everything he cared for on earth for the sake of a principle; when he fired into the mob that night he believed he was putting an end to his whole career. He came here the next day and told me that he was going on, that he was going to do the right thing, as he saw it, no matter what it might cost him."

"It must have been very hard for him," murmured Miss Nestor, sympathetically.

"Hard!" Jean laughed excitedly. "Oh, no, Aunt Mary, it was n't hard. And I made it so much easier! I tried to get him to give it up, pleaded with him that it was going to hurt *me* if he kept on. I begged him not to make the facts public, for my sake. I did n't want to suffer. It was all right for him to hurt his friends or himself, you see, but I must n't suffer, my family must n't, although we were responsible for the whole thing. Oh, yes; I made everything very easy and simple for him!

"And, then, I not only let him go away without a word, but I 've stayed here while Father 's been making these attacks on him. I 've let everybody think I believed them justified. I 've virtually countenanced them. I told Dick I believed in him, loved him. And how have I shown it? By failing him in every possible way! I 've failed everybody, including myself, of course. Just at first, I

thought I could help Father. That was my excuse for staying here. But I have n't it now; I 've known for days that it *was* just an excuse; self-deception, if you like, perhaps unconscious self-deception, but all wrong, just the same. And when I think of the way I talked to Dick, and then compare the way he acted with the way I 've acted, I 'm ashamed to look at myself in the glass."

Miss Nestor shook her head helplessly.

"You do exaggerate things so, Jean," she said. "Half the time I can't understand you."

And then she made what was perhaps the shrewdest observation she had ever made in her life:

"You don't make enough allowance for human nature, dear. You build impossible ideals out of people, and then when the poor things fail to live up to them you condemn them out of hand. You 've no toleration, not even for yourself. You can't set the world right in a minute; you 've got to wait for the good to grow. Now, you just act sensibly. Stay here, and do what you can to comfort your father. Send for Dick, and explain to him—"

"Explain to him?" echoed Jean. "Explain that I 'm a weak, selfish coward, whose boasted 'nerve' deserted her at the first real test? Send for him? Aunt Mary, I would n't send for Dick Leighton to save my life! He cares for me now—or he did,

before I showed so plainly the miserable stuff I 'm made of—but he 'll get over it, and he 's a hundred times better off without me. He 's a real man, and he deserves a better woman than I shall ever be. There 's just one thing left—and that 's for me to go back to the sort of work that I 'm fitted for, the sort where I can help and not hinder. I 've done Dick enough harm already."

XXVI

JEAN spent Sunday morning packing. She gave the task her undivided attention. She packed thoroughly and efficiently, taking as much time over it as possible, because as long as she could concentrate on the problem of how to get into one trunk articles that obviously were intended to occupy two, she believed she could keep from thinking about Dick.

When the dinner-bell rang she sent down word that she had a headache and did not want anything to eat. The truth of the matter was that she did not want to sit through a meal with Miss Nestor's wistfully sad eyes reproaching her silently for a stand the justice of which her own conscience absolutely acquitted her. Nor did she care, as long as it was avoidable, to face the ordeal of a family Sunday dinner with her father.

So she shut herself in her room and kept on working, in the stubborn determination not to rest until she had put Dick Leighton completely out of her mind. But what she actually did, at last, was to toss a handful of handkerchiefs into the till of the trunk, slip down on the floor beside the chaise

longue, and bury her face on her folded arms, while she let the image of the man she loved come as it would into her thoughts.

Dick as a laughing, curly-headed boy her school-books tucked under his arm, trudging sturdily along beside the small girl in starched gingham who was her prim little self. Dick, contrite, consoling, flinging his knife, most cherished of all his possessions, over the box hedge because the blade had cut her finger. Dick in his first long trousers, painstakingly instructing her in the mysteries of paddling a canoe up Squatter Creek. Dick, tall, handsome, a cavalier of whom any girl might feel proud, hurrying out of the office for a word with her as she passed on her way down the street. Dick growing from childhood into boyhood and from boyhood into manhood, developing, changing, yet always the same Dick. Her Dick. For he had always been hers. She knew that. And no matter what might come to either of them in the years that stretched ahead, there was that part of him that would always be hers.

Scantily as she had rewarded his devotion, ignominiously as she had failed him, she believed that somehow he understood, and that never would he shut her entirely away from him in spirit. They had been so close, had seemed so much a part each of the other. She had only to shut her eyes to feel

him with her. And his imagined presence, instead of disturbing, brought her comfort, relaxation. Her head weighed heavier upon her supporting arms . . .

When she awakened, the clear late light of the afternoon streamed through the windows. The hands of the ivory clock on the dressing-table marked the hour of five. She could not have been asleep more than two hours, at most, but she felt as if she had slept a long time. A deeper slumber, it must have been, than any she had had in weeks. Her arms and legs ached from inaction and from her cramped posture. She got up stiffly, and went to the dressing-table, picking up the brush to smooth her hair.

She heard some one moving in the hall, footsteps outside her door, a knock.

"Yes?" she asked. "Who is it?"

Her father's voice answered:

"I wish you 'd spare me a few minutes in my study, Jean, if your head is better."

"I 'll come at once, Father," she said.

"Thank you."

In a moment she followed him.

The study was a room she seldom visited. It was understood in the Ainsworth family that when the head of the house entered there he was to be left undisturbed. Usually the door was kept shut.

It was a large room, so that the furniture, of which there was rather too much, did not clutter the floor space.

There was a handsome leather couch, broad and deep, between the west windows. Three or four easy-chairs were set about. The massive desk faced the door; flanked on each side by a tall filing-cabinet, its ink-well and fittings of heavily carved bronze, it was distictly impressive. On the open space in front of it the dull hues of a fine Oriental rug toned in with the rich red-brown of the floor stain. There were a great many books, in open cases built against the walls. But except for the desk the room bore no stamp of Ainsworth's personality.

When Jean tapped at the half-open door the Congressman rose and came forward with the meticulous politeness he customarily observed with his family. He was wearing a suit of white flannels, with a soft-collared shirt turned back from his throat. The coat fitted badly; it looked too large for him.

"I hope," he said, "that you are feeling better."

"Yes, thank you; I am."

"Will you sit down?"

She took the nearest chair. He selected one out of direct range of the strong western light; but even though he seemed at some pains to keep his back to the windows Jean noticed that his face was thinner;

the skin was drawn tight over the high cheek-bones and there were hollows under them. Mary Nestor was right: there was no doubt that he had suffered.

"I wanted to know if you had changed your mind about going, Jean," he said.

"No, Father."

" You expect, then, to leave to-morrow morning?"

"Yes."

"There 's nothing I can say, nothing I can do, to induce you to reconsider?"

The interview, it seemed to Jean, was resolving itself into the usual cross-examination, with herself in the witness-box and her father as prosecuting attorney. She answered, as patiently as she could:

"I 've already explained, Father, that I should be willing to stay here if you would withdraw entirely from this campaign."

"And I 've already told you that it is impossible."

"Then I 'm afraid there 's no more to be said." She half rose, but Ainsworth stayed her with a gesture.

"There 's a great deal more to be said, Jean. You lay stress on a point which, however important it may seem to you, has at least nothing to do with the hospital. The building is completed, and needs only the equipment. You are the only one qualified to take charge of the work there—"

"Doctor Evans is perfectly capable," Jean inter-

rupted. "He 's not a very young man, but he has kept abreast of modern methods. You 'll find him both practical and efficient."

"But I built the hospital for you!"

Jean stared at her father in astonishment, not so much because of his statement as because of the way in which he made it. It was almost a cry, helpless, protesting, as if the words were wrung from him against his will.

"I built it for you," he repeated. "So that you 'd come home. I—wanted you, Jean. You said you would n't give up your work. I thought perhaps if you could go on with it here, to a certain extent anyway, that you 'd be willing to come back."

In the infrequent letters that Tommy had written her during her last year in New York he had more than once asserted that the Ainsworth hospital was expected to accomplish what all other means had failed to effect, the return of Jean to Randolph. "A pretty high bribe, too," he had called it; nor had he hesitated to express his opinion of the whole transaction. But Jean had paid little attention to his outbursts, putting them down to pique over his failure to persuade his father to let him go and work with young Masters. By Ainsworth's own admission, Tommy had been right.

"It is very difficult for me to talk to you, my dear," the Congressman added, as she did not speak.

"We express ourselves in different terms." He sat hunched a little forward in his chair, his forearms resting on his knees, the finger-tips of his right hand pressed against those of his left. "Because I 'm not naturally demonstrative you think I have no affection for you. I have. A great deal." He swallowed and went on jerkily: "You and Tommy were both very dear to me. I 've lost him. I don't want to lose you. I want you to—stay here with me."

Jean was silent. A new and strange pity for her father tugged at her heart; but she instantly hardened again as he said brusquely:

"It 's because of Leighton you 're going, Jean." He got up from his chair and stood before her, looking down with the frown that as a child she had dreaded. "Do you still love him?"

"Yes," she answered simply, directly.

"In spite of—Tommy?"

She, too, rose, facing him. Her color was high, her breath a little quick. She was no longer a child, no longer subject to that old childish fear of him. She was a woman grown; and if David Ainsworth had never realized it before, he must have known it then. The light from the setting sun poured through the wide windows and fell full on her face. It was a very lovely face. There was no defiance in it, no bravado; the lips were firm,

the eyes steady and gravely accusing. In the poise of the head there was courage and self-possession, hard-won and not easily to be shaken. She said very quietly:

"There is no possible way in which that could make any difference in my love for Dick, Father. You know that the responsibility for my brother's death lies elsewhere."

Ainsworth turned from her abruptly and walked over to the window.

She went on:

"You 've had plenty of time to think. You know exactly why Tommy went downtown that night. You know what it was that made him disguise himself in that old suit of somebody's else clothes and mask his face. You 've heard—you could n't very well have *helped* hearing—the things he said to the men downtown: it 's all public property now. You know how the whole idea got into his mind in the first place. And you know in your heart that the charges you 've made against Dick are absolutely false. He was the sheriff and he had sworn to protect the prisoner in his charge. He was doing only his duty when he shot Tommy. I know it; everybody in Randolph knows it. You know it, whether you 'll admit or not."

Ainsworth spoke without turning around.

"I—I do know it, Jean," he said with difficulty.

She fell back a step, catching her breath.

"Yes, and you knew it the day after Tommy was killed! You as much as admitted it then, when I told you the charge you made was false, and you said it was true enough for your purpose! You accused and threatened. You knew then whose methods were corrupt and unscrupulous, but you hated Dick and you wanted revenge. You did n't care how you got it.

"I did n't understand. I thought you were sincere, even if you were terribly mistaken. I stayed with you because I was sure that when you 'd had time to realize what a wrong you were doing an innocent man you 'd be quick to right it. Well, you realize it now! You know that your accusations are all false, and you keep right on making them! You pile one dishonor on another, until it is *our* name, not Dick's, that you 've made a stench in the nostrils of the State! You've made me ashamed of it, ashamed that I bear it!" The man at the window winced away from the bitter scorn in the clear young voice.

"You 're still accusing," she said, "still threatening. Truth and decency and self-respect are just meaningless words to you. You admit that you know the charges you make are false, and you told me a moment ago that you won't abandon your stand!"

"Jean, I—"

She did not heed him.

"You 'll keep on! You let Tommy go to his death; you 've done your best to ruin Dick Leighton. It 's no fault of yours that you have n't succeeded! You 're going to keep on trying. And you ask me to stay here and countenance this—this *crime*, as I 've tacitly done all along. I can't do it. I won't do it. If I had n't been an arrant coward and weakling I should have left you before!"

"Jean—"

"No! I can't talk any more about it. It 's no use. Goodby."

She turned quickly to the door. Ainsworth did not try to detain her. As she went out she had a glimpse of his profile, silhouetted against the opal light beyond the window, the features sharpened and angular, the chin bowed down over the shrunken throat.

She shut the door behind her and went back along the hall to her own room.

XXVII

CORY JACKSON admired extravagantly the house at the corner of Hill and Summit streets. He had been in it only once during the lifetime of Judge Randolph, but he had a tenacious memory and he recalled every detail of the big library with an accuracy that struck Dick Leighton as almost uncanny.

"I see Miriam 's finally got away with Buddy," he remarked, pointing the stem of his pipe toward a small triangular shelf in the corner behind the old desk. "She was always bent on doin' it. Three or four times she sneaked him off, the Judge told me. *She* said Buddy was n't decent, and it was n't respectable to have no false gods in a Christian house; but the Judge allowed he had a sneakin' fondness for the old fellow and made her fetch him back. That 's the only thing that 's different, though; you have n't had much time for change, I s 'pose."

"Nor inclination," said Dick. "I like the room just the way it is. I rather grew up with it this way. I 'll speak to Miriam to-morrow and tell her to put the old fellow back where he belongs. I 've

a sneaking fondness for him myself. For a 'false god,' he said a good many things that are true."

"Oh, you know about him, then. Well, I never heard nothin' but his name, and that struck me as kinder chummy; but he don't pretty much, does he?"

Dick agreed that he did not.

"Well," pursued Jackson, "between him and Miriam you 've got a handsome household. I did think you was goin' to have somebody in it that would brighten it up some, but I s'pose that 's all off. I 'm not tryin' to nose into your private affairs, you understand," he added quickly. "I 'm just—well, I 'm just interested, if you don't mind my puttin' it that way. Me an' Bill"—he nodded toward the gaunt teamster who sat on the other side of the table, puffing stolidly at his pipe—"think pretty well of you, Dick, and we 'd like to know things was all right for you. Which I s'pose they ain't."

"Thanks; I understand, Cory," Dick said simply. "Things are n't as I 'd like to have them, but it can't be helped."

Jackson sighed.

"Too bad. A woman would do a sight for this place—the right sort of a woman, I mean. Not that there 's much the matter with it as it stands; only—well, she 'd make it comfortable. You know, Dick, I 'm strong on things bein' comfortable.

Now, a man can make a bar-room comfortable; I 've done it myself; but it takes a woman when it comes to home."

"That 's why you ain't married, I cal'late," drawled Murray. "If you had a missus you 'd be more comf'table home than you would be behind the bar and then you 'd quit the saloon business."

"Likely to do it anyways. Prohibition 's comin' soon. If it was n't"—he grinned cheerfully—"I 'd have to get busy and fight Dick. He 's got his reform boots on and he 'll likely go stampin' all over the place. When he gets to Washington he 'll sure raise blazes. And he 's goin'; that 's one sure thing."

"You think so, too, Bill?" Dick asked.

Murray removed his pipe from his lips, ejaculated, "Cinch!" and put the pipe back.

"Of course it 's a cinch," Jackson said. "He 'll poll the biggest vote in the history of the district. Dave Ainsworth will be buried under the landslide, clean out of sight. If," he added significantly, "he ain't buried elsewhere before that time."

Dick swung himself about in his chair.

"What do you mean, Cory?" he asked sharply.

"If you did n't look the other way when he went a-past you on the street you would n't need to ask me. He 's a sick man. Pity for him he ain't a bit sicker. Then he 'd have to stay in the house and

keep quiet. Every time he opens his mouth he puts both feet and an umbrella into it. He 's talked around until he 's as popular hereabouts as a skunk at a garden party. But at that," he added honestly, "I can't help feelin' sorry for the poor devil."

Murray snorted.

"I am, I tell you," persisted Jackson. "It 's just like somebody 'd kicked the bottom out of his world, an' he 's hangin' on the edge with his teeth, an' clawin' the air. He 's all in, down an' out. He 's been high water around here for more years than I like to remember, an' it must be some bitter dose to see the dam go out overnight. Granted, it 's all his own fault; that don't help *him* none. He was fond of that wild youngster of his, too."

"He ain't to be trusted," growled Murray into his pipe.

"Well, who 's sayin' anything about trustin' him? You can be sorry for a burglar, can't you, without leavin' the safe door unlocked?"

"He 's a bad actor. Always has been. You ask Dick. He knows. Could n't work with Judge Randolph and not know."

"Oh, the Judge never liked Ainsworth," Jackson conceded readily. "No more he did me. Said he hoped he 'd live long enough to see Dick put us both out of business. Well, Dick 's done for Ains-

worth already, and I guess my joint's on the list for a clean-up. Well, politics is politics."

"Politics is hell," amended Murray, and reached for the tobacco jar. "Let's go, Cory."

The telephone on the desk at Dick's elbow shrilled peremptorily. He took up the instrument.

"Hello!" he said. "Yes, this is Mr. Leighton speaking." A look of puzzled surprise went over his face. "Why, yes, I think I can," he said slowly. "In half an hour, say?—Very well." He hung up the receiver and turned to Jackson: "That was Ainsworth calling. He says he wants to see me on a matter of importance."

"Comin' here?" Murray asked.

"No. He wants me to go to his house."

"Well, don't," the teamster advised. "Make him come to you. Give him an inch an' he 'll pull it out to a foot to trip you with. He's a bad one, Dick. Don't go."

"I 've already told him I would, Bill."

"All right. Your business. Watch him, though. Comin', Cory?"

At the door Jackson turned.

"Bill 's right, Dick," he said. "He 'll bear watchin', even now, when you 've got him on the run. Likely he 'll have some 'compromise' to suggest. Well, don't you make none, you hear me?"

"I 'm not going to, Cory; you need n't worry. I have n't the ghost of an idea what Ainsworth wants; but if it 's a 'compromise,' there is n't any. Good night."

It was a walk of but four or five minutes along Summit Street to the Ainsworth house. As Dick turned up the walk the sun was just sinking out of sight beyond the rim of the western hills. The flat beams lay like broad golden bands across the lawn, and were flung back blindingly from the glass roof of the little conservatory that was Mary Nestor's especial care.

The windows of Jean's room were closely shuttered—the first time that Dick had even seen them so. For a moment he was halted by the fear that she might be ill, dangerously perhaps. That would explain why he had not seen her, why— But he refused to entertain the thought. Resolutely he had put all speculation and conjecture from his mind; he would not let them enter now.

Kitty answered his ring at the bell. Evidently, she had been told to expect him, for she said at once:

"Mr. Ainsworth is in the library, Mr. Leighton. Please go right in."

The shades had been partly drawn, to temper the heat of the sun; the room was full of a diffused yellow light, shot through with brighter gleams

where the last rays slipped in between the swaying folds of the curtains. David Ainsworth stood on the hearth in one of his characteristic attitudes, his feet a little apart, his hands clasped behind his back. He took two steps forward, bowing with stiff formality.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Leighton," he said. "I appreciate your courtesy in coming."

Dick's bow was quite as non-committal as his "Not at all, Mr. Ainsworth"; but it was with difficulty that he repressed an exclamation of shocked surprise. The Congressman's face was the color of parchment and as lifeless. His dull eyes lay far back in their hollow sockets. When he moved toward the chair opposite the one to which he waved Dick he seemed to move with difficulty.

"There is a matter of which I wished to speak to you privately before it is made public," he said. "I preferred to make an oral statement directly to you, in advance of the one over my signature which I have prepared for the press and which I intend to give out to-morrow."

He paused an instant, then went on, speaking precisely, and with almost painful slowness:

"While my feelings toward you personally have undergone no change whatever, while I still feel that your conduct in the matter of this nomination has been entirely unscrupulous, I have become con-

vinced that you are not morally responsible for my son's death."

Dick flushed. This was the last thing on earth he had expected. He said lamely:

"I—I thank you, Mr. Ainsworth, I—"

"No thanks are necessary, sir. Nor—understand me—does this retraction mean that I shall not continue in my opposition to you."

"I understand that, of course," said Dick. "But—" he hesitated, groping for the right expression for the confusion of his feelings—"but I hope you will let me say that your personal conviction means more to me than your public retraction."

"My intention is not to do you a favor, Mr. Leighton," Ainsworth said haughtily. "And I am not looking for any favors in return."

"You mean that you do not expect me to alter my attitude?"

The Congressman bowed.

"Precisely that. I do not want you to get the idea that I am asking you, even in a roundabout way, for—clemency. You are at perfect liberty to proceed as you see fit. And, furthermore, I am frank to tell you that if it were not for another factor it is extremely doubtful that I should have taken this course. I—" He stopped; his fingers went to his collar, pulling at it as if its soft folds

constricted his throat unbearably. There was suddenly that in his face that made Dick look away, so like it was to spying on the innermost secret of a naked soul.

Twice Ainsworth essayed to speak, before he succeeded. Then:

"My daughter is leaving Randolph to-morrow morning," he managed. "I should like to have her understand before she goes that I acknowledge—my error."

It was surrender. Surrender complete and final. Surrender unconditional. The walls were down; the gates were wide; the way lay open for the march of a triumphant victor. But Dick Leighton experienced no feeling of triumph. Rather, he was filled with an immense pity.

The grim tragedy of it gripped him—that this man should have been forced to beg him, Dick Leighton, whom he hated with a bitter, implacable hate, to keep for him the one precious thing that was left in the waste he had made of his life. For it was quite clear now what was that "other factor"; the last straw that had crushed his pride and brought him, a supplicant, to the feet of his enemy.

Stripped of prestige, position, power, his son dead as a consequence of his own act, his name besmirched, his friends and adherents alike in arms

against him, he stood alone, with only Jean between him and chaos. It was to keep her that he had done this thing.

"I think I understand, Mr. Ainsworth," Dick said gravely. "I shall tell her gladly if she will see me."

Ainsworth looked at him quickly, furtively. It was such a look as a condemned man might give to one who had the power to commute his sentence.

"I thank you," he said thickly. "I will call her. If you will excuse me—?"

He bowed again, rose, and went out of the room, a feeble old man with haunted eyes and shoulders bowed under an intolerable burden of pitiless remorse. Gordon Randolph had been right when he said that nothing could bend David Ainsworth. He had not bent; he had broken.

It was growing dusk in the room. In the twisted pear-tree just outside the window, a bird chirped once, drowsily. A cool breeze stirred the curtains, and wafted in a breath of honeysuckle. Dick heard Jean's soft, swift footsteps as she came down the stairs to him.

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
A 000 129 588 0